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Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Tuesday 21 February 2017

Mardi 21 février 2017



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Todd Decker

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 21 February 2017

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 21 février 2017

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: A point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Good morning, Speaker. I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding changes to the memberships of standing committees.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed. Minister?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I move that the following changes be made to the membership of the following committees:

That on the Standing Committee on Estimates, Mr. Milczyn replaces Mr. Dong, and Mr. Mantha replaces Miss Taylor;

That on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, Ms. Malhi replaces Mr. Rinaldi;

That on the Standing Committee on General Government, Mr. Anderson replaces Mr. Rinaldi, Madame Des Rosiers replaces Ms. Malhi, and Mrs. Munro replaces Mr. McDonell;

That on the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, Madame Des Rosiers replaces Mr. Potts, Mr. McDonell replaces Ms. Scott, and Mr. Walker replaces Mr. Hillier;

That on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Mr. Dhillon replaces Ms. Malhi, Mr. Dong replaces Mr. Milczyn, and Mr. Hillier replaces Mrs. Munro;

That on the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, Ms. Malhi replaces Mr. Anderson, Mr. Dickson replaces Mr. Dhillon, and Ms. Scott replaces Mr. Clark;

That on the Standing Committee on Social Policy, Mr. Rinaldi replaces Mr. Anderson;

That on the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills, Mr. Rinaldi replaces Mr. Dickson, and Mr. MacLaren replaces Mr. Walker; and

That on the Standing Committee on Government Agencies, Mr. Anderson replaces Mr. Kwinter, and Mr. Oosterhoff replaces Mr. Cho.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I've got to start it. The government House leader moves that the following changes be—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Dispense? Dispense.

Do we agree? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader seeks unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed. Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(b), the following changes be made to the ballot list: Ms. Hoggarth and Madame Des Rosiers exchange places in order of precedence such that Ms. Hoggarth assumes ballot item number 75 and Madame Des Rosiers assumes ballot item number 31; and

That notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot item 34 be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader moves that, notwithstanding standing order—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Dispense? Dispense.

Agreed? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

CONSIDERATION OF BILL 27

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Again?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice to fast-track Bill 27 in committee.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader seeks unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed. Government House leader?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I move that, notwithstanding any standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 27, An Act to reduce the regulatory burden on business, to enact various new Acts and to make other amendments and repeals, that the Standing Committee on

General Government be authorized to meet on Wednesday, February 22, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., and on Thursday, February 23, from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. and from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. for the purpose of public hearings on the bill; and

That the Clerk of the committee, in consultation with the committee Chair, be authorized to arrange the following with regard to Bill 27:

—Notice of public hearings on the Ontario parliamentary channel, the Legislative Assembly's website and Canada NewsWire; and

—That witnesses be scheduled to appear before the committee on a first-come, first-served basis; and

—That the deadline for written submissions be 6 p.m. on Thursday, February 23; and

—That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the Clerk of the committee shall be 9 a.m. on Friday, February 24; and

That the committee be authorized to meet on Monday, February 27, from 2 p.m. to 8 p.m., for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; and

On February 27, at 5 p.m., those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. At this time, the Chair shall allow one 20-minute waiting period pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Tuesday, February 28. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That, upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on General Government, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called that same day; and

That, when the order for third reading of the bill is called, one hour of debate shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

The vote on third reading may be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader moves that notwithstanding any standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 27, An Act to reduce the regulatory burden on business, to enact various new Acts—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Dispense?

Carried? Carried.
Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SAFER SCHOOL ZONES ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ ACCRUE DES ZONES D'ÉCOLE

Mr. Del Duca moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 65, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act in respect of speed limits in municipalities and other matters / Projet de loi 65, Loi modifiant le Code de la route relativement aux limites de vitesse dans les municipalités et à d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm delighted to have the opportunity to discuss this particular piece of legislation. I'm also delighted to know that I'll be sharing my time with the member from Kitchener Centre, who we all on this side of the House have the privilege of working closely with. In particular, she serves as the parliamentary assistant at the Ministry of Transportation.

I was giving some thought this morning to the remarks that I'll be providing on this legislation, and I think it's entirely fitting that we are debating this today, on a day that follows Family Day. There is a lot in this legislation that is so important to families right across the province.

Before I delve into the legislation itself, I do want to mention that we are joined in the gallery today by some individuals who are here on behalf of organizations that work very closely with the Ministry of Transportation and have done so for quite some time. We are joined by Elliott Silverstein, the manager of government relations at CAA, and Scott Watson, manager of government relations at Parachute Canada. I want to thank them both for being here.

I understand we're also going to be joined by Brian Patterson, who is the president and CEO at the Ontario Safety League. I believe Brian is on his way here.

Interjection.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: As is being pointed out perhaps ironically, he's stuck in traffic, but I'm sure Brian will be here just as soon as he can possibly get here.

As I was mentioning just a second ago, we are here today to talk about Bill 65. There's a lot that's captured by this bill. There are three main elements to the legislation itself. As many in the House will recall, a number of weeks ago I joined with the Premier here in Toronto, in a community known as Leaside, to make the formal announcement relating to our government's decision to move forward with the elements in this legislation. Just to point them out off the top of debate this morning—first of all, this legislation, which is known as the Safer School Zones Act, would, if passed, provide municipalities with the option to use three

particular road safety tools. I'll highlight those quickly, Speaker.

0910

The first one is something we call automated speed enforcement. It is also known, of course, as photo radar. This would provide municipalities across the province with the power and the authority, should they choose, to proceed with implementing automated speed enforcement, using technology to deal with some of the challenges around drivers who still, notwithstanding all of the great efforts made by our government and others, including our road safety partners—to encourage people to drive more responsibly through two critical areas of communities: school zones and community safety zones.

Speaker, I want to stress that through this legislation, automated speed enforcement or photo radar will not be implemented on provincial highways. This is unique in that it will provide power to the municipalities, should they choose to deploy this technology, to help deal with challenging road safety issues in school zones and community safety zones.

The second element is reducing default speed limits, regarding what municipalities will have the power to deal with. Again, this is all about empowering municipalities, enabling them, giving them the tools to make decisions for themselves and their residents when it comes to the default speed limits.

Many in this House will know that the default speed limit in the province of Ontario in urban settings is 50 kilometres an hour. But there is very clear recognition from our Premier and our government that our municipal partners, our municipal leaders, will often—in fact, in almost all cases—know better than we will here at Queen's Park what the unique requirements are in their neighbourhoods and in their communities. Again, this is about empowering them to make decisions as it relates to that particular point.

The third element deals with the red light camera program, a program that has existed for some time in the province of Ontario. It provides municipalities with the opportunity to gain access or entry to the program. It smooths out the transition, or it smooths out the efficiency, making it easier for them to gain entry into the program. The red light camera program, as I mentioned, has existed in the province for some time. This simply strengthens it and makes it easier for municipalities to participate.

Speaker, there are a couple of things I should mention now that I have laid out what the key points are in the legislation. First of all, we have heard from a number of municipalities across the province over the last couple of years. Literally since the first few weeks that I was on the job as Minister of Transportation starting back in June 2014, not only have we heard from municipalities, but a number of members on the government side have been talking about some of these issues for a number of years. I don't want to limit it to just this individual, though he is a good friend and a seatmate, but—I'm talking about the Attorney General, the member from Ottawa Centre, who

has been talking not only to me, but also been talking with his community, with neighbourhoods, with parents and with other community groups in Ottawa Centre about the importance of making sure that we provide municipalities with those powers, those tools, to make decisions for themselves.

I know that in the case of Ottawa Centre and in communities right across the province of Ontario, we have heard from municipal leaders who say, "We understand that there needs to be an overarching requirement to set the rules of the game, to set the table, as it were." But very often, when you're sitting in Queen's Park, despite your best intentions, despite wanting to make sure you build on the phenomenal track record that the Ministry of Transportation has and has had historically as it relates to road safety, we often confront challenges, particularly in school zones and community safety zones, particularly as it relates to default speed limits that need to be sculpted and need to be nimble, because of the challenges we're facing.

Whether we're talking about Ottawa Centre, or whether we're talking about communities like Leaside that have unfortunately witnessed their own tragedies historically as it relates to these issues, or about communities right across the province of Ontario, the notion is that we can work closely with our municipal partners and provide them with the tools so that they can go through a process to determine at a grassroots level, at a neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood level, what makes the most sense for them. Again, I want to acknowledge the contribution and the relentless pursuit, the relentless advocacy, of the Attorney General on behalf of his community, and all others on this side of the House who recognized very early on that this was the right way for our government to move, or the right way for our government to go.

I talked off the top about the fact that there are a number of communities for which this is extremely important. I should say that there are a number of communities very specifically—and I think it's important for us to recognize which communities. Whether we're talking about the automated speed enforcement piece or we're talking about the requests regarding reducing, amending or sculpting the default speed limit, literally the list of communities that asked us for this power, this support, this authority, would include the cities of Ottawa, Toronto, Hamilton; Oxford county; Chatham-Kent; Oshawa; York region, which, of course, has a number of communities that are part of York region, including Markham, Richmond Hill, Georgina, East Gwillimbury, my own home city of Vaughan, Nottawasaga; and the region of Waterloo. Those are the communities that made the request regarding automated speed enforcement. On the default speed limits, in addition to that list I just gave, Ottawa, Toronto, Kingston and Smith-Ennismore-Lakefield are some of the communities that talked to us about the importance of moving forward on default speed limits.

Many times in this Legislature over the last two years, in response to questions and in debate, I have talked at

length about the very proud track record that we have here in the province of Ontario as it relates to road safety. One of the lines that I know members on all sides of the House have heard me say repeatedly is that for the last 13 years, as it relates to road or highway safety, Ontario ranks first or second across all North American jurisdictions. You don't have a track record like that by accident. In fact, in one of those years, the only jurisdiction that was better off in some respects than the province of Ontario was the District of Columbia, which goes to show that when you compare Ontario, with its road network and with its population, we are only in that particular area beaten out by a much smaller jurisdiction, the District of Columbia.

By and large, as I said, you don't amass a record like that by accident. Regardless of partisan strife, regardless of which particular provincial government we're talking about, you do it when your Ministry of Transportation, working very closely with all of our road safety partners, including those who are represented in the gallery today—when you are focused exclusively on those outcomes, and, when you recognize that there are significant challenges within the system, that you work together, that you partner and collaborate together, so that you can produce positive outcomes.

Of course, one of the first—in fact, the first piece of legislation that I introduced in this House was Bill 31, the Making Ontario's Roads Safer Act, which, when you look at the component parts of that legislation, pulls together much of what had previously been contained in two other pieces of legislation brought forward by predecessors of mine in this ministry. We consolidated those elements into one bill. We added some other pieces, particularly around dealing with sanctions for drug-impaired driving for the first time ever. We consolidated all of those elements and brought forward Bill 31. We had significant debate here in this Legislature, and certainly at committee and elsewhere, on Bill 31. I would say that perhaps my proudest moment over the last two and a half years as Minister of Transportation was the day that that legislation passed in this House and did so unanimously. Members from all three caucuses stood in their places to support Bill 31. I think that was a very clear recognition on the part of members on all sides that when it comes to not only maintaining but enhancing and improving upon our road safety record, there's a requirement to consistently do more.

From my perspective, it's an evolutionary process. It's an evolutionary process that means, among other things, that we have to continue to listen to our municipal partners, who, as I said at the outset of debate this morning, understand in many respects more clearly than we might here in this Legislature what is needed in some of the neighbourhoods that we're talking about. That would be true whether we're here in the city of Toronto or, for example, we're in Waterloo region, which, we have heard, is one of the communities that made the request to the province for more authority to make some of the decisions that are germane to its neighbourhoods and its

communities. It's one of the reasons that we've been responsive.

At the same time, Speaker, we've also decided to move forward because we've heard loudly and clearly from law enforcement and from our road safety partners about the importance of that evolutionary process, of never resting on our laurels. It's one thing for a Minister of Transportation to talk about the last 13 years, but we have to consistently look for new and creative and innovative ways to make sure we are ahead of the next challenge. We know—I think everyone here in this House knows, and I've certainly heard it in the course of debate over the last number of months—what a significant challenge we face, for example, as it relates to the ongoing struggle against alcohol-impaired driving.

0920

I mentioned that Bill 31 contains provisions, for the first time ever, introducing sanctions for drug-impaired driving, which is not necessarily a new phenomenon but a growing phenomenon, unfortunately, that we are experiencing here in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, of course, everyone here will know very clearly about the significant challenge that we face as it relates to distracted driving. That's one of the reasons that we not only toughened the penalties for distracted driving in Bill 31, as I mentioned, but a number of months ago, the Ministry of Transportation also deployed perhaps the hardest-hitting public relations campaign in the province's history, a campaign known as Put Down the Phone, to try to drive home, in a compelling way, the message very clearly to our motorists, and I would say, particularly our youngest motorists: When you get behind the wheel of a car or the wheel of any vehicle on our roads and highways in the province or elsewhere, you need to be very focused on the task at hand, which is to keep your hands on the wheel and to keep your eyes on the road, and to not be distracted by hand-helds or other distractions or devices. The consequences, unfortunately, Speaker, are potentially far too great.

I mention these elements, and there are others that I'll probably touch upon, to help illustrate how the fight to constantly improve road safety is literally an evolutionary process, because we know that the challenge continues to persist. I think here, with this particular legislation, we see very clearly that we are taking the next important step forward in that evolutionary process.

I did mention this at the outset: To me, it is fitting that we are debating this particular legislation the day after Family Day. That day that the Premier and I stood along with Mayor Tory, members of law enforcement and representatives from our road safety partners—we actually did the announcement at an elementary school in Leaside. I have to say that Leaside is a community, as I mentioned, that was particularly touched by an extraordinary tragedy as it relates to speeding on quiet residential streets near schools, adjacent to schools. The level of awareness on the part of the parents and the school kids of the importance of making sure that we work with our municipal partners to put in place these

kinds of initiatives to help make their own travel from home to school and back again—safer for them, safer for their friends at school and safer for the other parents in the neighbourhood—is something that was truly compelling to them. You could actually see that sort of visceral feedback coming from the community to the Premier, to myself, to the mayor, and to members of law enforcement. There was recognition that these steps, perhaps overdue, were at least steps going in the right direction.

I should also point out that another colleague of ours on the government side, the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, is someone who has not only served in this Legislature with distinction for a number of years, but on road safety issues, he is someone who has literally been at the leading edge himself, who has consistently spoken to me about the importance of making sure that we hold our own feet to the fire, that we push that envelope a little bit and look at creative ways. I know in the past, and currently, this particular member from Eglinton-Lawrence has brought forward private members' legislation proposed specifically because he shares that passion that I do, as minister, that we do at the Ministry of Transportation. He shares that passion to make sure that we are striking that right balance and getting it right.

I know I've mentioned the member from Ottawa Centre, the Attorney General, and the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, but there are a number on this side of the House. Frankly, even members of the opposition, both the Conservative and NDP opposition, have spoken to me about the importance of making sure that we get these critical elements right. I know that we're going to have debate over the course of the day today, and over the course of the coming weeks, on this particular legislation, Speaker. I can't imagine there being stiff opposition. I don't want to presuppose the outcome of debate. Obviously, this is legislation that we aspire to and hope to pass, and I suspect that it will, because it's so important for it to land, and it's so important for us to provide these powers to enable our municipal partners to make these decisions that are mostly relevant to the challenges they are facing in their own communities. So I do look forward to hearing from members of both the Conservative and NDP opposition—and frankly, members from the government caucus—about their feelings with respect to this legislation.

I would hope, as I mentioned, that with Bill 31, when we had some vigorous debate, as should be the case in this chamber, that at the end of the day, members on all sides of the House saw the importance of that evolutionary process as it relates to road safety, saw that we had positive outcomes top of mind in Bill 31, and were therefore able to put partisanship aside and support that legislation.

I would hope, Speaker, number one, when you consider the requests that came from municipalities, and number two, when you would consider that nothing in this legislation compels any of Ontario's 444 municipalities to do any of what is included in this bill that simply empowers them to make decisions locally that matter

most to their neighbourhoods—because, again, in some respects I would argue that being closest to their neighbourhoods, they would understand the needs of individual neighbourhoods better than we would here at Queen's Park.

Again, I want to stress, for the purposes of debate here, that nothing in this legislation compels a municipality to move in a particular direction, and that we take into account that there is a lot of new technology out there. In this case, we're talking about photo radar, or automated speed enforcement, that helps make it easier for us to make sure that in terms of providing a penalty for those who would continue to speed through a school zone or a community safety zone despite signage—despite it being, I would argue, second nature to know that when you're in a school zone, you should not be speeding—in addition to the penalties that would be levied, there is also a deterrent factor, because people would know over the course of time that they were entering a school zone or a community safety zone where there would be automated speed enforcement like what currently exists for our red light camera program. There would be that impediment, and there would be that notion, that public awareness.

When you combine that with what I would argue should be an innate or inherent understanding, when you're entering a school zone, of all things—whether we're talking about school-age children, elementary school-age children, or their parents or grandparents who are walking them to school—that at all times somebody would want to drive through one of those zones at or below the speed limit is second nature, I think, to all of us in this House. But it's evident from what we hear from law enforcement, from tragic examples that we've seen in a number of communities, that we need to do more.

When you take that into account, combined with what I'll call the effective or the efficiency measures we're dealing with on the red light camera program, and the notion that we're empowering municipalities to make decisions for themselves as it relates to their default speed limit, I would be hard pressed to understand exactly what an opposition—well, not a critique, Speaker, because I understand that this is exactly the place for opposition parties and opposition members to lend their voices to debate and to come forward with questions or concerns they might have. So it's not criticism, particularly of a constructive nature, that I would be surprised by, but any strident opposition to this particular bill would be a surprise to me, and I think it would be a surprise to our partners in law enforcement. I think it would be a surprise to our road safety partners, like CAA and Parachute and the Ontario Safety League and many others.

I think it would be a shock to our municipal partners, who would look at this particular legislation and understand that at its core, there are two objectives in this legislation. One is moving the yardsticks forward and demonstrating significant progress in terms of achieving the very important road safety outcomes that we collectively want to achieve and, at the same time, based on that

very collaborative and constructive partnership that we have with our municipalities across the province, providing them with the power and the authority to move forward with any or all of these initiatives, should they choose to do so.

Whether we're talking about the importance of a constructive, collaborative relationship and providing more support and more enabling power to our municipalities, or we're talking about those really critical road safety objectives and outcomes that I know everyone here shares—and I know it, Speaker, because there was unanimous support for Bill 31, as I mentioned, and frankly, there have been calls from opposition with respect to pushing the envelope further and looking for more creative ways to drive road safety outcomes. I would be surprised if we didn't have broad-based support at the same time as vigorous discussion around this particular bill.

Of course, I would certainly use this opportunity at this particular moment of this debate to encourage members on the other side of the House to engage in that vigorous debate that I expect of them, that we expect of them, but at the end of the day, understanding those crucial twin objectives, to be supportive of these initiatives.

If they see ways for us to improve the legislation—of course, Speaker, I always want to keep an open mind and have that discussion, as I know we will over the course of the legislative process.

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I think understanding, at the end of the day, that those twin objectives, particularly the objective of making sure that even though statistically we have done well over the last 13 years—we can't afford to rest on our laurels. We have to keep pushing the envelope forward. The ministry is absolutely determined to consistently look for ways to drive home that message, and also make sure that we have a legislative and regulatory framework in place, working with our municipal partners to make sure that we can produce those outcomes.

Again, I would sincerely hope that the debate, as it always is in this place, would be rigorous, would be exciting, but at the end of the day, that we would all see a way to be supportive of this particular legislation. As I mentioned earlier, I have heard, not only from colleagues on this side of the House, but from members of both the Conservative and NDP caucuses, about the importance.

It's interesting, because when you're in a large city like Toronto or Ottawa, you hear a certain perspective on many of the issues that we confront in this chamber. When you move to some of our medium-sized and smaller and more remote communities—and I'm not talking about this bill necessarily; I'm talking about generally—you often hear very different perspectives. That's something that helps all of us do our job better. It's a fascinating by-product of all of us being in this chamber to debate legislation.

On road safety initiatives, I would say, it's interesting to me that the perspective—because something that

might work in the city of Toronto may not work in a particular other part of the province—while there is nuance, at its core, the fundamental objectives that we try to pursue when it comes to road safety initiatives are felt in many respects equally across the province.

I think that goes right to the heart of this particular bill, to Bill 65. We are not in this legislation requiring any particular municipality to do what we are demanding needs to be done. I know often there's a concern in different parts of the province that there are directives coming from Queen's Park. People say, "Hey, look, down here on the ground in neighbourhood X or community Y, maybe you didn't contemplate what that outcome would be." I understand that tension. I understand that dynamic. Here, with this legislation, what we are particularly doing is saying to municipalities, "We understand there is a challenge." There is a challenge in communities like Ottawa, like Toronto, like York region, like Oxford county, like Chatham-Kent, like Oshawa, like Nottawasaga and a number of other communities that have taken the time to write in to the government to say, "Provide us with these powers."

At AMO conferences and at ROMA/OGRA conferences in the past, I've heard directly from many of these municipalities that confront these challenges. They say, "We love the work that MTO is doing as it relates to road safety. We respect that you passed Bill 31, but there are additional tools in the tool kit that are available to you, but we are hampered. We can't do them without your support, without you enabling us, without you providing us with the authority to proceed." We have some examples that are embedded in this particular legislation. It's why, after considerable consultation on a number of these initiatives, we've decided to move forward with this legislation.

I know I've said this before in debate this morning, but I think it bears repeating that it really is important for us to understand that this legislation has two philosophical underpinnings:

(1) Moving forward with initiatives that will, at the end of the day, when municipalities—I am going to say "when" because I know a number of municipalities very strongly desire having the power to move forward and implement some of these initiatives. When municipalities have, should this legislation pass, taken the tools that would be provided, they will actually experience road safety outcomes in their communities that will benefit the population at large. That's one, and as the Minister of Transportation, that is my most fundamental goal with this legislation.

(2) There is a very clear recognition here that one level of government working alone, one level of government saying, "We know what is best for you as it relates to matters that impact your own neighbourhoods in this road safety respect," is not always the best way for us to proceed. Taking that into account, and taking into account the significant and profound input that we have received—from a number of organizations, from law enforcement, from our road safety partners, from mothers

and fathers and grandparents across the province, who have spoken to us both informally and formally and said:

“When I leave my house in the morning in whatever community I reside in in this wonderful province of Ontario and I’m walking my son or my daughter or my grandchild to school, and I’m doing it in a neighbourhood where it’s apparent—the school is right there. I’m in a school zone or we’re in a community safety zone and I am literally the dictionary definition of a vulnerable road user, or my child or my grandchild is, and there is somebody out there driving—maybe they’re late to get to work, maybe they have a delivery that they’re dropping off somewhere in the city and they’ve decided to cut through our neighbourhood; maybe, frankly, they live in the neighbourhood, but they’re late, they’re behind schedule, and they decided on this particular day of all days that they’re going to gun it, that they’re going to exceed the speed limit and they’re going to put themselves and passengers in their vehicle and, worst of all, other users of our roads, including those vulnerable road users, at risk, that’s not acceptable.

“We have an expectation that our political leaders, whether they’re provincial or municipal or, best of all, working together, will come up with creative solutions that recognize that technology has evolved, that we have a clear need in our particular neighbourhood or our community that we have to move forward with initiatives like this.”

That’s a message that we can’t ignore, that we won’t ignore. It’s a message that’s right at the heart of Bill 65. It’s why, after this consultation, after listening to those voices, working closely with our municipalities and working closely our road safety partners, we have come together, we have created this legislation and we have brought it forward.

I have certainly heard from community representatives in every corner of the province that they are happy to see we are moving forward. I think each of our road safety partners would say very clearly that this is an important step forward in that evolutionary process that I referenced a second ago. I fully expect that this will not be the last time that I’m on my feet in this Legislature to talk about how we continue to move that evolutionary process forward.

I know there are other challenges that we still face on road safety. I know there will be, I expect there will be other initiatives that we’ll bring forward. But at this particular point in time, dealing with these particular elements that are contained in Bill 65, and given that we’ve had historic support externally from law enforcement, municipal partners and road safety partners and, frankly, internally in this chamber from members of the opposition as it relates again to the passage of Bill 31, which passed unanimously, I think we’ve struck the right balance. I think we are moving forward in the right direction.

I do look forward to the rest of the debate that will occur today and beyond on this bill, but I would close off, before handing it off to the member from Kitchener

Centre—I would strongly urge every member in this House to think of our vulnerable road users, to think of the requests that have come in from municipalities and to understand that we’ve struck the right balance, that with Bill 65, we have gotten it right. I would call on them to support this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much, Minister. Since you are sharing your time, I now turn continuation of the debate over to the member from Kitchener Centre.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Thank you, Speaker, and good morning and welcome back.

I’d like to thank the minister for the leadership that he is showing on this very important issue and also say that as a parent of two young children, I know that Bill 65 is of personal interest to him.

While many of you have heard the minister and me say that people in Ontario deserve to have safer roads, this government is fully committed to making sure that our roads continue to be among the safest in North America. This proposed legislation, the Safer School Zones Act, if passed, is going to ensure that we do maintain safe roads in Ontario. This legislation is going to protect children and other vulnerable road users, and it’s going to reduce collisions and fatalities in urban and rural areas, making our communities safer.

We know that many municipalities have asked for more tools to improve road safety so that they can be active road safety partners. When I assisted the minister a few weeks ago at the ROMA conference—and for people who are watching at home right now, ROMA is the Rural Ontario Municipal Association; we meet every year and they tell us what their concerns are—I heard from a number of mayors, reeves and councillors from across Ontario who were advocating on ways to slow down drivers who speed through their towns. In fact, one mayor, Margaret Lupton—she’s the mayor of Zorra township—told me, and this is an exact quote and she gave me permission to use this: “Daiene, we are frustrated beyond belief with speeders.” I called her up on Friday to let her know that we would be discussing Bill 65 and she told me something that was very distressing. She said that she was in a coffee shop and this man came up to her and started mocking the speed bumps that they had put in in the town in order to slow down speeders. He said to her, “You know, I can still take these speed bumps at 110 kilometres per hour in my truck.” So clearly, the speed bumps are not working.

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Mayor Lupton and other municipal leaders in Ontario are looking to us for ways to help them make the roads safer. They’re looking for more effective measures. The legislation that we have introduced will, if passed, give municipalities more tools to improve road safety. We are giving them the exact tools that many have asked for. This means that we’re empowering municipalities to implement measures that will work best in their communities.

We’re very enthusiastic about the support that we’re hearing from municipal leaders across Ontario. That

includes support from Waterloo region, my home community. Our police services wrote to our government to request automated speed enforcement, and they've shown support for the action that we're taking through this piece of legislation.

We recognize that no two municipalities are alike, Speaker; that's why this legislation is all about giving towns and cities across Ontario lots of different options.

If passed, the Safer School Zones Act will remove the regulatory approvals process currently in place for the red light camera program to make it easier for municipalities to opt in. This means if they want to do this, they can. They don't have to come and ask us for permission. This is going to help municipalities enforce red light laws in their communities.

The Safer School Zones Act will also help municipalities reduce speeds in high-risk areas. Municipalities can create their own safety zones, with lower default speed limits. That's going to make it easier for them to reduce speeds, thereby making it safer in their communities for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers alike.

Finally, the Safer School Zones Act will allow municipalities to use automated speed enforcement technology in school zones and community safety zones if they choose to do so. This technology has been around for years. It's proven to reduce speeding and improve road safety, and it's going to help keep vulnerable road users safe in these high-risk areas. That's one of our mandates, to ensure road safety for all road users, particularly in high-risk areas. That includes places where there are high numbers of children and seniors.

Bill 65 is the latest step our government is taking to provide road safety options to protect those communities as well as vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists.

As we saw in Bill 31, road safety is not a partisan issue. That is why we hope to see support for the Safer School Zones Act on both sides of the House. This is about making communities safer. It's about protecting our children and our families from dangerous driving behaviours, where they play and where they walk to and from school.

For many years, our family lived in a neighbourhood just down the street from a school, five doors down, and it used to infuriate me as a mother when my kids were walking home from school—or really at any other time—when I'd see cars speeding up and down the street. We were so close to a school, and I was always concerned about the children in the neighbourhood.

It's simply unacceptable that we have drivers speeding in these areas. Drivers should always be proceeding with care. An extra degree of care can be the difference between life and death, especially in high-risk areas that are frequented by young children or seniors.

Speaker, in 2013 alone there were nine pedestrians under the age of 18 who were killed in collisions in Ontario—nine children killed by drivers while they were walking in their communities. Clearly, more needs to be done to make certain that people can get to and from

home safely. This legislation, if passed, is going to give municipalities the tools that they need to make their journey safer.

Seniors are another vulnerable group. The number of seniors who are being injured and even killed while walking is quite alarming. In 2013, 45 pedestrians over the age of 64 were killed in Ontario. That is a distressing number. This is a vulnerable segment of our population, and one that we know is quickly growing. Soon many of us are going to be in that age bracket; right? Seniors deserve to feel safe on our streets. They deserve to be able to walk in their communities without fear. I urge everyone to support this legislation to make that happen.

In my home community of Waterloo region, in 2013, we saw four pedestrians struck and killed by motorists. Municipalities and police boards, including Waterloo region police, have reached out to us for help. They want the tools that they need to best address the road safety concerns that they are seeing and feeling in their communities.

We understand that these issues may not be the same everywhere, and that's why these measures proposed in this piece of legislation would not be implemented province-wide. I'll say that again: It's not going to be implemented province-wide. We're not proposing that red light cameras be installed at every intersection, or that automated speed enforcement be on every municipal road, and we are not putting automated speed enforcement technology on Ontario highways or changing the default speed limits in Ontario. Instead, what we are proposing is to give municipalities greater autonomy to use these measures at a local level only if they choose. It is entirely up to them as to whether or not they want to use these measures, and believe me, they are telling us that they want this.

Municipalities know what road safety concerns need to be addressed, and they know the areas in their communities that are of the highest risk, so why shouldn't they have the ability and the power to address this? They've asked us to put in a framework so that they can make necessary changes based on their respective needs. This means that we're empowering municipalities to make their communities safer in the way that they see fit.

Speaker, we know that there is a direct correlation between speed and death on municipal roads. Three out of four collisions on local roads occur because of speed. It has been proven that lowering speed limits and implementing other measures which deter speeding do improve road safety. Bill 65 includes two measures that will help municipalities reduce and enforce speed limits on their roads. The first is to reduce default speed limits. It's going to give municipalities the ability to create special zones in urban areas where the speed limits are lower than the standard default of 50 kilometres per hour. There is a significant amount of research which shows that lowering speed limits even by 10 kilometres per hour can lead to significantly fewer collisions, injuries and deaths. It gives drivers more time to react to emergency situations such as children running onto the streets. Have

you ever been driving down the street and suddenly you see a ball bouncing onto the road, and quickly a child follows behind that ball to retrieve it? Well, if you're going at a slower speed, the chances of you stopping in time are going to be better.

Not only do lower speed limits help prevent collisions; they also reduce the severity of injuries that happen when collisions do occur. Lower speeds in urban areas can save lives. We know that. Municipalities have asked us to make it easier for them to do this, to save lives, and that is exactly what we're looking at doing with this legislation. It's going to help them make their communities more walkable and more user-friendly.

Lowering speed limits is one way to make communities safer. Another is finding ways to deter people from speeding, and that's where automated speed enforcement comes in. With automated speed enforcement technology, cameras can take a picture of a licence plate of someone who is speeding, and then that person is issued a ticket. That's how it works. The technology is used in a number of jurisdictions already, and it is proving to be very effective. We did have this in Ontario back in the early 1990s for a few years on our highways; we don't anymore. However, at the municipal level, leaders in communities are asking for a return in order to calm speeding. People are less likely to exceed the speed limit in areas where there is this technology, and less speeding means safer streets.

Since this proposed legislation would give municipalities the ability to use this technology in school zones and community safety areas, it also means more protection for children and other vulnerable users. The technology also means more efficient enforcement by freeing up police resources to address other local safety concerns while at the same time making sure that road safety is never disregarded. This is something that we heard about at ROMA from many municipal leaders: that they would rather take their well-trained, well-skilled policing force and address them to issues within the community where there could be crime or other matters, and leave the business of issuing tickets to speeders up to automation.

It's a similar technology for the red light cameras that's proposed for the legislation. Both technologies use cameras to target dangerous driving habits. For automated speed enforcement, we're proposing to allow municipalities to use this technology in specific high-risk zones on municipal roads. For the red light cameras, we're making the approvals process easier and eliminating the red tape to make it simpler for municipalities to opt in if they wish to.

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Speaker, all three parts of this proposed legislation will help make our roads safer, and that alone should be enough reason for everyone to support it, like they've supported similar road safety measures in the past. I think that everyone in this Legislature would say that they're in favour of safer roads.

We have a great track record in Ontario when it comes to improving road safety. We've done a lot, but we still

have more to do. Keeping communities safe requires everyone to do their part. It's not just about one group using our roads; whether it's drivers, cyclists or pedestrians, everyone needs to be safe and play an active role in promoting road safety.

When it comes to road safety, our goal is always a balance of measures and actions which encourage everyone to stay safe, from penalties to increased awareness. When you look at recent road safety legislation, that's clearly evident. In the Making Ontario's Roads Safer Act, which passed in 2015, there were a number of measures that focused on improving road safety—including school bus safety, distracted driving, cycling safety, tow truck safety, school crossings, pedestrian crossovers and impaired driving. That legislation was a major step forward for road safety in Ontario, and it has helped to make our province a safer place. It, like other road safety legislation passed before it, is one of the reasons why we have the road safety record that we do in this province.

Again, it's extremely important that we don't stop working toward improving safety. Someone is killed on our roads every 17 hours in Ontario. With the Safer School Zones Act, we're continuing to push Ontario's road safety forward, we're helping to make our communities safer, and we're sending a message to municipalities that we are listening and we're committed to being their road safety partners—partners such as Mayor Margaret Lupton of Zorra township, who is looking for ways to reduce speeding in her community. I promised her that I would stand and advocate for her and ensure that she will see changes in her community.

That's why it's so important that everyone support this legislation. It is a crucial step forward. I know that keeping our roads safer for our children is something upon which we can all agree.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Harris: Thank you, Speaker. Welcome back.

I want to also quickly acknowledge our road safety partners. I see Elliott from CAA over in the corner. I know Brian Patterson from the Ontario Safety League is now here. He fought traffic in. Of course, there's a gentleman from Parachute, whom I have not had a chance to meet. Welcome to the Legislature.

Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity to rise. I welcome everybody back after a long winter break, perhaps. I know there were lots of happenings in your constituencies. Of course, things don't just stop over the course of the winter.

Hopefully, everyone had a great Family Day weekend. I know I did.

Being back, I miss the opportunity to take my son to the school bus sometimes in the mornings and pick him up in the afternoon. We live off a busier street, and I did have the experience of taking him out to the bus and witnessing, unfortunately, a few close calls in the last little while. So I think it's important that we're talking about safety in our school areas.

I was hoping that the minister would have—he did miss that opportunity to speak to the toll bill. I know we had a lot of discussion over the break on tolls. Hopefully, we'll save that for another time. I know there's a speech that he wasn't able to give previously, but I hope we'll be able to hear that down the road.

I'm going to have an hour here. I'm going to focus a little bit, right off the bat, on our concerns related to what we will call the photo radar act, a more appropriate title than the Safer School Zones Act, given that this bill, while indeed impacting school safety, is really more about photo radar, a technology with a long—and, as we will discuss, not so favourable—history in the province of Ontario. For those of us who have trouble recalling its history, when the divisive issue of photo radar was addressed in this House, a short two decades ago—I'll take a few minutes to take you down memory lane.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you, Speaker, and welcome back to all the members of the Legislature. Today, of course, we're talking about Bill 65, which is going to allow municipalities to have the discretion over speeding limits in their towns, cities and urban centres.

Speaker, that is something that I hear about all the time, about the speeding limits in school zones. We had a very serious accident a few years ago where a child in a neighbourhood was walking on the sidewalk and the vehicle actually came up on the sidewalk. It was a tragic situation. The child was injured, with very serious life-long injuries. In that case, Speaker, that person was impaired. There were all kinds of other factors that contributed to that.

Regardless, when I was campaigning back in 2014, everywhere you would hear people complaining about speeding. It wasn't just in school zones; it was people averting other traffic-congested areas coming down side streets. So it is very important that we look and address those concerns for speeding. Children's lives are at risk.

We know that today many kids are transported from their neighbourhoods in school buses to other neighbouring schools, and it becomes a heightened issue with school buses and kids walking to school as well.

In London, I know there was a council that brought forward a bylaw that wanted to address speeding zones, specifically in school areas. I think this will help, of course, but we also need to make sure that distracted driving and other issues are also part of these contributing factors when there are accidents and unsafe drivers. Speeding is probably one of the main concerns and it is a good idea to allow and empower municipalities to set their own guidelines around the unique characteristics of their city.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to be back and a pleasure to see you in the chair. I understand I have a new critic as Minister of Labour, the member from—what is it, Renfrew? I've got to learn this now. Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke is my critic.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, you'll learn it.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I look forward to the time that he and I will spend much more closely together.

Getting to Bill 65, Speaker, I think this is certainly a bill that is worthy of support of the entire House. I think a lot of us who serve here, before coming here, served at the local level of government, either on a town council or a regional council.

Despite what you might read in the Star, the Globe, the Sun or wherever, the number one phone call you get as a local elected official is about speeding, traffic, safety and school zones. It's about all those things that matter to people in the areas where they live, in the neighbourhoods where they come from. They often find out when they go in to investigate who is doing all the speeding in these neighbourhoods—I think the people in the neighbourhood think it's people coming from outside and doing the speeding. Every time they do any licence plate checks or that type of thing, they find out that the vast majority of speeding comes from right within the neighbourhood itself. A lot of the culprits don't understand that, I think.

What we're doing here is we're providing municipalities in the province of Ontario with tools to ensure that their communities can be made safer. We are doing it in a way that allows the municipalities themselves to implement this in a way that is customized to their own community, to their own neighbourhood, to the areas which they know a lot better than anybody in this chamber. These people are on the ground. They have the traffic experts that know their communities better than everybody.

What this does is to provide them with the tools and the options, and quite frankly, Speaker, at the end of the day, this is going to make our communities safer. It's going to save lives. It's going to prevent injuries. Why anybody would be opposed to that is beyond me. I hope it enjoys the support of the whole House, because it really is a bill that is aimed at the heart of public safety in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

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Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the Minister of Labour for recognizing my new critic responsibilities. I'm sure he'll get to know my riding really well over the next several weeks. In fact, you're probably going to be repeating my name in your sleep.

Anyway, on the issue of the bill: Look, what could be more important than the safety of our children and our grandchildren? I'm not going to look into the talk about the attributes of the bill right here and now because we might have another opportunity, and I'm sure our critic is going to be speaking about it at length. But I did want to talk about how important that is to all of us.

Just a couple of weeks ago, my wife and I had the opportunity to be down in Orlando, at Disney World. We had five of our grandchildren with us.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, we had their parents too; we're not quite that crazy.

What a wonderful time it was. To spend some time with the little ones—I think you understand even more just how important they are and what a priority they must be for all of us. So if there are ways that we can keep our children and our grandchildren, depending upon our personal circumstances, safer, we're always going to be looking at that and we're always going to be supportive of those ways.

I know there are parts of the bill that we want to make sure we understand better, about its limitations, but keeping our children safe in school zones is something that I personally support, obviously. If this is something that the communities are supportive of—and I believe they are—it's something that I would personally be very much in favour of. We want to make sure that this doesn't become a political football that gets kicked around.

Also, the challenges that municipalities have: I know that my municipality is concerned that they would have to lower the speed limit beyond where they want to go, if it's established, and they want some clarification on that.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The minister is shaking his head saying no, that won't be necessary. We'll be looking for that clarification when it comes to what municipalities do and do not have to do with regard to this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the minister for final comments.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to thank members, of course, starting with the member from Kitchener Centre, who followed me in debate; the member from Kitchener-Conestoga, my critic; the member from London-Fanshawe; the Minister of Labour; and the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for their contribution to the debate this afternoon.

I know that much additional debate will take place. I'm looking forward in particular to the contribution of my critic from the Conservative caucus to the discussion. I think it's entirely fitting that both he and his colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke chose to start off their questions and comments back to me with very clear recognition from both of them about the importance of making sure that we do place a significant emphasis on producing those additional safety outcomes. I think that's encouraging.

Certainly, to have heard the member from London-Fanshawe talk about experiences that have taken place in her community—tragedies—is also something that I think would resonate because it has happened in communities right across the province.

To the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, I would say: I know we will have discussions regarding what this legislation requires or doesn't require of municipalities. I just want to stress really quickly that there is nothing in this legislation that requires the municipality to do anything. So if it's one of the communities in his riding or it's my community of

Vaughan or York region or Waterloo region—nothing in this bill requires a municipality to touch their default speed limit if they choose not to. Nothing in this bill requires them to deploy automated speed enforcement if they choose not to. Nothing requires them to enter the red light camera program if they choose not to. We are certainly enabling municipalities.

On that note, Speaker, I'll finish off by saying that I think we also have to be very careful in this debate to not, for what might be considered partisan reasons, try to confuse the issues of the history of photo radar with what we're actually discussing in this particular debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Harris: Getting back into the routine here—I forgot about the questions and comments cycle—now I've got an hour and two minutes. We've got a lot to cover, of course. My colleague talked about his trip away with his grandkids. Of course, I think of my little guys. I know my guy is safe at school this morning. My other little guy was not feeling too well last night. He's just at home, hopefully watching SpongeBob or something and not the legislative channel. If he is, good morning, and welcome.

I do think it's important, as I have an hour here to go through the bill in its entirety—we'll compliment the government, obviously, on addressing some issues that I think we all have heard in our communities, but there will be opportunities to question the details of the particular bill.

I do think it's important, when I have this opportunity, to go back and perhaps give a little history lesson. I think it's important for all of those, whether you're here or at home—a history lesson—because it was back in August 1994 that the then NDP Premier and soon-to-be eventual Liberal MP, Bob Rae, flush with his excitement at forming the first and, to this point, last NDP government in the province, introduced us to the concept of photo radar, a new safety tool that motorists soon came to know as a government “cash grab.”

Now, to be clear, Speaker, the photo radar program introduced in August 1994 by the then NDP, Mr. Rae, was much larger in scope than what we hear government discussing today, and I think that's an important distinction to note. The initial program was introduced on the 400-series highways across the province, as opposed to the school zones, as is the stated focus of today's bill.

As my colleague has made mention here, I want to again acknowledge our road safety partners. Brian Patterson is here, Elliott Silverstein is here from CAA and, of course, the gentleman from Parachute. Welcome again to the debate.

As I had said, the initial program was introduced on 400-series highways across the province, as opposed to the school zones, which we're talking about. That said, there have been many who have noted that today's bill may open the door to questions that could take us back to the future.

Within three months of the 1994 project launch, the provincial program was churning out around 12,000 or

close to 13,000 tickets a month, leading the forefathers of today's Ontario Liberals criticizing the NDP photo radar pilot as "nothing but a cash cow."

As ticket fines surpassed \$2 million in November of that first year, with the OPP confirming some people were getting dinged for driving less than 10 kilometres an hour over the speed limit, many shared the Ontario Liberals' concerns.

That said, Speaker, while the Liberals were criticizing the cash grab, we got to work to eliminate it. Former Premier Mike Harris both promised to put the brakes on the controversial program and then immediately acted to eliminate it, following the 1995 election.

In the words of our former colleague and then-Solicitor General Bob Runciman as to the concerns for the NDP's photo radar program: "We believe having officers on the front lines is much more effective in terms of curtailing this form of activity than photo radar"—calling it "a cash cow for the NDP." Without a doubt, those are the two main concerns or questions when it comes to photo radar programs: Is it having an effect on improved road safety, and at what cost?

The fact is, at the time, there were varying reports on the amount of safety improvements, but there was a pretty clear consensus on what this was costing motorists. For instance, photo radar advocates cited a January 1995 MTO preliminary four-month study showing photo radar had reduced speeding on highways. On the other hand, that same year, there was an overall drop in speeding drivers across Canada, when those other areas did not have photo radar. Still others cited the fact that photo radar did nothing to catch other dangerous driving behaviours, such as distracted driving. We have that problem still on our roads today. In fact, one of the leading causes of fatalities on our highways, of course—unfortunately, we still have drunk driving or driving while impaired, both with substance and with alcohol.

I know we had a consensus in this House on Bill 31 recently that improved the fines and penalties for driving while impaired. It's an important mechanism to stop people from doing that. Unfortunately, we've still had instances across the province where we have seen fatalities, just tragic fatalities, for the senseless use of a substance while operating a motor vehicle.

Of course, there's operating a vehicle without a licence or even insurance. Dangerous driving: I think I heard on the radio just this morning that there was a young gentleman—24, I believe—nabbed for speeding over 200 kilometres an hour in a 60 zone. That's a significant charge. We still have all of these behaviours happening on our roads.

Many questioned then, and continue to question today, the impact on driver behaviour when ticketing through photo radar is assigned to the vehicle's owner and not necessarily the driver.

I had an experience only a few months ago in my community. I was picking my son up from the bus. He got off, the bus pulled away, and there was a speeding car going down our street at probably at least double the

speed limit. I was so upset by that. It was a young driver, of course. Ideally, I would have loved to have had a police officer there to deal with that behaviour. Of course, who knows? The vehicle may have been owned by his parents, and if this were the case, he would have received a ticket a few months down the road—or not even actually himself.

1010

These things are happening, and as a parent, it's upsetting, knowing this. It's that behaviour change that needs to happen. We do question whether that behavioural change will come with ticketing at the moment of the alleged infraction, and that is, of course, through the use of front-line officers, which we feel are still so important, especially in these school zones in the morning hours and afternoon hours when the kids are getting off the bus and walking home from school etc.

The fact is that while we see the Liberal government introducing a return to photo radar today, there has also been long acknowledgment on that side of the House of the list of concerns that accompany photo radar, and I think it's important to bring these up. I'm going to have an hour, so we're going to get through the bill in its entirety. But I wanted to bring a few of these up, because when I read some of these quotes, I just couldn't not share them with my colleagues today.

Former McGuinty government Finance Minister Greg Sorbara, in this very House, called photo radar "the most arbitrary, objectionable, obnoxious... one of the most repulsive pieces of legislation that the government has brought in"—that being the NDP—"because it just completely abrogates our very long-standing tradition in this province of being innocent until you're proven guilty in a court of law." That was Greg Sorbara in, I believe, the seat now occupied by the now Minister of Transportation, who would know Greg well.

He further noted, "If you set the precedent with photo radar, then, the precedent having been set, you arbitrarily move into a whole bunch of other areas, without due process, without the normal procedures for identifying and apprehending and charging the person who committed the offence."

Or how about former Liberal Minister of Natural Resources and Aboriginal Affairs David Ramsay, who told the House, "I think that's what the problem is: The government sees this type of thing, this type of apparatus as policing and that's the last type of thing I consider to be policing." That was David Ramsay, a former Liberal minister.

A former energy minister, Liberal Gerry Phillips, said that "it is a revenue-grab; it is a tax grab. It heads down a very dangerous route. I don't know where the government is going to draw the line, because if you do it with speeding, you can do it with all sorts of other things, and we won't have that debate." That was Gerry Phillips, then-energy minister under the Liberals.

What about the former Premier himself, who, after much back-and-forth, said in 2006, "We looked at it in our first year and we have rejected it so it is not part of

our plans." That was back in November 2006, from Premier McGuinty himself.

Those plans, or lack thereof, made headlines the following year, in 2007, in a report: Ontario Premier Says No to Photo Radar. Quoting Mr. McGuinty, "There seems to be a stronger consensus around making sure that there are tougher penalties associated with speeding."

Further, "More needs to be done to crack down on speeding, but photo radar is not the answer." He said that in 2007.

I will say, because I know I only have a few seconds left—one minute—that we will have an opportunity to get back into this, and I look forward to doing so.

I want to thank the minister for bringing today's bill forward, and thank him for allowing us to go over the rich history of photo radar here in the province of Ontario. I'll have more to say about that as we continue our debate.

But I think it's important that we keep in mind the pitfalls of the past and the concerns that remain today, as outlined by my colleagues, as we look forward to further debate focusing on the application of photo radar in school zones specifically as well as the extended community safety zones that this bill will target, to ensure that Ontarians remain safe in the province of Ontario.

Thank you, Speaker, for the time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much—

Mr. Michael Harris: By the way, I want to just acknowledge—you're going to shut me off now—that I'll continue on—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'll get that. I want to thank the member. You will have opportunity. There is lots of time left on the clock. When this bill is called again, you will have the opportunity to continue debate.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): But since it is now 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

QUEBEC MOSQUE SHOOTING

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to observe a moment of silence before question period in remembrance of those who lost their lives in the Quebec mosque shooting on January 29, 2017.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to observe a moment of silence before question period in remembrance of those who lost their lives in the Quebec mosque shooting on January 29, 2017. Do we agree?

I would ask all members in the House to please rise for a moment of silence.

The House observed a moment's silence.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order, the leader of the third party.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to move a motion that would sever schedule 10 from Bill 27 and introduce it as a separate bill to be considered by the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The leader of the third party is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree?

I heard a no.

Mr. Todd Smith: Point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order, the member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you, Speaker. Winter disconnections in the electricity system are becoming a critical issue. Therefore, I seek unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 30(a), I be permitted to introduce a bill at this time.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a bill. Do we agree? I heard a no.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm really honoured to have a good friend of mine, who is participating in Daughters of the Vote, here at Queen's Park today. Kayla Tiller, welcome to Queen's Park.

I also would like to welcome a new page from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, Anella Orosz. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I would like to introduce my new legislative intern, joining us from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound: Stephanie Lowe.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'd like to welcome Jillian Hawley from my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, who is here with Daughters of the Vote. We're thrilled to host them today at Queen's Park.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I'd like to welcome Hillary Scanlon from Peterborough, here today as the Peterborough–Kawartha delegate for Equal Voice and Daughters of the Vote.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I would like to welcome Karley George. She's the delegate for Daughters of the Vote from the riding of Kitchener–Waterloo.

Hon. Reza Moridi: Please join me in welcoming the students from the McMaster University Iranian association. Pardis Balari, Seyed Aryan Ghaffarizadeh, Pouya Tayyari and Maryam Vaseghi-Shanjani are sitting in the members' gallery. Please join me in welcoming them.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I want to mention that Leslie St. Amour is here for the—hopefully we're going to be taking a picture, all of us, at 11:45 with Daughters of the Vote—as well as my constituent Elliott Silverstein from CAA.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Good morning. I am delighted to welcome Blake Weber, a student at Fanshawe College, here today to watch question period. Welcome, Blake.

Hon. Michael Coteau: It is my distinct honour to welcome Bruce Davis here to the Ontario Legislature, a good friend of many members in the Legislature and also the former chair of the Toronto District School Board.

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, I want to introduce to you, and through you, to members of the Legislative Assembly, a constituent from my riding who is here with Daughters of the Vote. I would like to welcome Michaela Rutherford-Blouin, who is representing the new name for my riding, Leeds-Grenville-Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm delighted to see an old friend, Brian Patterson, in the House from the Ontario Safety League. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: On our first day back I'm very pleased to introduce somebody who is proud to call Huron home: Regan Preszcator. She's here with Daughters of the Vote.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I would like to welcome a group of young women from across the province to Queen's Park today. Equal Voice is here and so is the Ontario delegation for the Daughters of the Vote initiative. Welcome to Queen's Park. We hope you enjoy your day.

For my colleagues, there will be a reception this evening in rooms 228 and 230. I invite you all to stop by and meet these amazing young women.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I would like to welcome Luca DiPietro from St. John Catholic Elementary School, who is the legislative page here from my riding.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to welcome Leslie Anne St. Amour from Kingston and the Islands, who's here for Daughters of the Vote.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, it's great to be back. I want to welcome all members.

I would like to introduce Nancy Peckford, the executive director of Equal Voice, and Denise Siele, who has been incredibly important to the Daughters of the Vote initiative, as well as all the young ladies here who are going to not only change the Ontario Legislature but certainly the federal House of Commons in March.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: The first day of the Legislature also means the kickoff to Kindness Week in Ontario. I'll just remind all members to join the members from Dufferin-Caledon and Nickel Belt for some Kindness Week cookies right outside the chamber after question period.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Welcome back, Speaker.

I want to welcome a guest, here today on behalf of Equal Voice and Daughters of the Vote. It's Floranda Agroam.

Hon. Eleanor McMahon: Speaker, welcome back. Please join me in welcoming, from Burlington to Queen's Park today, Marilyn and Murray Heintz and Gloria Reszler. Welcome to Queen's Park.

APPOINTMENT OF HOUSE OFFICERS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I do have some housekeeping. I'm happy to advise the House of an

appointment of two House officers. Trevor Day has been appointed Deputy Clerk. He has also absorbed the responsibility of executive director of legislative services.

Also in the House, Jacquelyn Gordon has been appointed Sergeant-at-Arms and executive director of Precinct Properties. I would respectfully remind the members and suggest to the members that you won't mess with her any more than you would have messed with Dennis.

MEMBER FOR YORK-SIMCOE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Another important announcement: I also want to let the House know that late last month the member from York-Simcoe, Mrs. Munro, became the longest-serving female MPP in the history of the Ontario Legislature. And, yes, she kind of snuck that one in. First elected in June 1995, the member now has served a period of 21 years, eight months and 16 days, and we will be announcing every day you're here that you're the longest serving. What an accomplishment. 1040

On behalf of the entire House, we want to thank you for your stellar service to the assembly, to your riding and to the people of Ontario. Please welcome her.

Applause.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Also in the Speaker's gallery, we have the Sergeant-at-Arms' family: her husband, Don Gordon; her daughter Holly Gordon; her sister Leslee Remigis; her brother-in-law Marty Remigis; and her friends Patty Hayman, Cheryl Linger, Darlene Fisher, Lina Crawford, Kim Duncan, Mackenzie Viviani and Robert Viviani.

Congratulations, and thank you for joining us here in support of our Sergeant-at-Arms.

Applause.

RESIGNATION OF MEMBER FOR SAULT STE. MARIE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, during the adjournment, a vacancy has occurred in the membership of the House by reason of the resignation of David Oraziotti, the member from the electoral district of Sault Ste. Marie, effective December 31, 2016.

Accordingly, I've issued my warrant to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for a by-election.

TABLING OF SESSIONAL PAPERS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I also beg to inform the House that, during the adjournment, the following reports were tabled: the 2016 annual report of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth and a report from the Financial Accountability Officer.

Therefore, it is now time for question period.

Mr. Todd Smith: Speaker, point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order; the member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Now that everybody's settled in and we're warmed up after our long winter break, I was wondering if I could seek unanimous consent to bring forward, notwithstanding standing order 30(a), a bill at this time to deal with winter disconnections in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the passing of a bill. Do we agree? I heard a no.

It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. I want the Liberals to be aware of the F.J. Davey Home, a long-term-care home with 374 beds, in Sault Ste. Marie. Their hydro bill has gone up 39%, and that's an additional \$165,000—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have—

Interjection: Disrespectful.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Well, quite frankly, I'm hearing the member's comment, and it seems to be going around from everybody nicely. It reminds me of something I used to have to do to start something.

Please put your question.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, the government may laugh and heckle, but this is a seniors' home. This is a long-term-care home where their hydro bill has gone up 39%, \$165,000 in a year. It is not a laughing matter.

Seniors in Sault Ste. Marie are having critical services cut. The home said they had no choice; it's hydro or cut services for seniors. So rather than heckle, I would like an answer from the Premier: How can you allow this to continue to seniors in our province?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to just welcome everyone back, and I want to say that it is no laughing matter. It's absolutely essential that the Leader of the Opposition and the people of Ontario understand that we understand that there are issues around the cost of electricity in this province. I don't know the specific instance that the Leader of the Opposition is talking about at that particular home, but I certainly would be happy to get more information from him.

I have made a commitment that the affordability of electricity in this province is of paramount concern. We have made a number of changes, including the most recent 8% reduction across the board. But I have com-

mitted, Mr. Speaker—and our Minister of Energy is working to bring forward a proposal before our budget that would further reduce electricity costs across the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: The F.J. Davey Home is just one example of how electricity is hurting even more than family households.

Katherine Craine, executive director of the Huntsville Hospital Foundation, told the Huntsville Forester about a returned fundraising email card that she received. I'll quote what the card said: "Sorry, no donation this year. The money went to paying my Hydro One bill."

Mr. Speaker, it's unbelievable. How can the Premier justify the fact that families have gone from being able to donate to charity to now needing charity simply to pay their hydro bill? It is unacceptable.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that I have been talking to people across the province, I have made a commitment that we will be bringing forward further decreases to electricity costs. The reality is that over the last number of years, we have made billions of dollars of investments into our electricity system. We inherited an electricity system that was degraded, that had not been invested in, that had not been kept up, and electricity in this province was unreliable.

We've made those investments, and now we're confronting the reality that people have across the board seen unacceptable increases. We've made reductions. We know that there's more to be done, particularly for people living on fixed incomes and low incomes and people who are dealing with delivery charges that are out of whack, people in rural and northern communities. We know that there's more that has to be done.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: These rehearsed talking points are getting tired, and the people of Ontario aren't believing them.

The Premier said she gets what ratepayers are struggling with in rural Ontario. Let me share an example. Matt recently tweeted a picture of his hydro bill from Lanark Highlands to the Premier, so I'm sure you've seen it. It was tweeted to you. His bill listed \$4 worth of hydro used and a shocking \$110 used for delivery.

How can the Premier justify that an individual here has a hydro bill where only \$4 is for electricity and \$110 in delivery charges? It's out of whack.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I appreciate the Leader of the Opposition quoting me, because I just said that. I just said that delivery charges that were out of whack, that were disproportionate, that that's one thing that I have heard about repeatedly, as has the Leader of the Opposition and as has the leader of the third party and—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That brings me to my comment that I am going to tighten things up a little if I have to, and I will.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —as has every member in this House. We recognize that the investments that have been made to make sure that this electricity system is clean and that it's reliable, that there's a cost associated with those investments—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: So we know that there's more that needs to be done across the board to help people with their electricity bills, to deal with the disproportionate costs of distribution in particular parts of the province and to help people living on low incomes to deal with their electricity prices.

Those affordability issues are what are driving the changes that we have already made and that we will bring forward before the budget.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Patrick Brown: The Premier said that they're going to get to delivery charges. They've been in office for almost 14 years. What's their new line? "Just give us another 14 years and we'll try to get to it"? People are tired of waiting.

But since I can't get an answer on delivery charges, let's talk about winter disconnections. I am disappointed, Mr. Speaker, that a motion was put forward to the House today and the government said no. They could have ended it today. I don't want to delay a week. I don't want to delay another day. We need action on winter disconnections today.

So my question is—we'll put this motion forward right again after question period—rather than partisan games, will you support the motion? Yes or no? Yes or no?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me just say that for a good portion of the time that this government has been in office, we've been fixing the electricity mess that was left by the previous government.

Let me just say, on disconnection, there are two things that have happened this morning. As one of the first orders of business today, the government House leader actually introduced a motion that fast-tracked Bill 27. So I appreciate the support.

But on top of that—

Interjection.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, second time.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: On top of that, the Minister of Energy has actually been reaching out to send letters to all of the local distribution companies in the

province. The vast majority of them are already in compliance with "no winter disconnections." But what we have said is if there are any out of compliance, then—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I'm moving to warnings.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: If there are any that are still out of compliance by midnight tonight, then we will bring forward a piece of legislation that we hope would get support, and we'll move to get those disconnections stopped.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier. The Premier says she has been fixing hydro bills for 14 years. Let me say: Please stop trying to fix it. You've taken competitive energy bills to among the highest in North America.

Back to winter disconnects: A source at the Ontario Energy Board told Global's Alan Carter that the minister could issue a directive to stop winter disconnections—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The deputy House leader is warned.

Finish, please.

Mr. Patrick Brown: We know from Alan Carter that the minister could have issued a directive to stop winter disconnections, according to the Ontario Energy Board. Rather than actually act immediately, he doesn't seem to realize he has a majority; he doesn't realize he has this power; he doesn't want to support the motion put forward today.

What I'm asking is, no more games. Will you support the motion today? We can't afford to wait another day. Will you do the right thing and support the motion today—not tomorrow, not in a week, not in six months—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Stop the clock.

Be seated, please.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to be able to rise and welcome everyone back to the House. As the Leader of the Opposition should know, I can actually send tasks to the OEB, but I can't give them directives. He should actually—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound is warned.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I wouldn't tempt it. Finish.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: So maybe the Leader of the Opposition could talk to the new Clerk and find out the information about the process that we can do in this House, because he does not have the information.

Talking about playing games—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The member from Nepean–Carleton is warned.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Talking about playing games: The Leader of the Opposition is doing just that. We had a bill in front of this House that could have stopped winter disconnections in June, but they didn't support it in June, Mr. Speaker. They didn't support it in September—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm sorry. Stop the clock. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is warned.

How many more before you realize I'm going to get this stopped?

Go.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: They didn't support it in October, November or December. We now have our motion brought forward by the House leader that actually will see Bill 27 come to fruition by next week. If we get everyone's support, we can have it passed by then and ensure that we'll have the law of the land taking care of our winter disconnections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Directly to the Premier: We don't want to wait another week. We've been hearing that same tune for a year now. This needs to be addressed. Seniors are hurting. Families are hurting in Ontario.

Let me share the story. On Friday, a 76-year-old man told listeners on Andrew Lawton's radio program that he'd been without power for four months. The Minister of Energy is saying to wait another week. How many other seniors is the Premier going to let freeze in the dark before we do the right thing? Mr. Speaker, directly to the Premier—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Municipal Affairs is warned.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Directly to the Premier: I don't want to hear the Minister of Energy blame the opposition, blame seniors for not understanding their hydro bills, or blame Alan Carter for getting it wrong.

My question is directly for the Premier: Will you support the motion in an hour when it's before us? You can end this in an hour. You can end winter disconnects in an hour if you do the right thing. No more games, Premier. No more games.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. As a reminder: to the Chair, please.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: No, it's to the Minister of Energy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm sorry. Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only one I'm blaming is the Leader of the Opposition for not actually passing this in June. We have a bill ready to go; we have by the end of the day today. I asked all LDCs to voluntarily comply. We have a significant number of them doing so, and if they choose not to do

that we will make sure that the law of the land will be brought forward tomorrow and there will be no more winter disconnects.

The only party that has been playing games with this issue is the Leader of the Opposition and his party. Rather than talking up programs that are available or talking about ways that we can actually help people avoid disconnects, he just stands up and shakes his fist and offers no plan.

We have plans. We're bringing forward issues that will address winter disconnects. We're going to make sure that this is taken care of by tomorrow, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

New question?

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. I met a woman named Charlene who lives in Sault Ste. Marie and she has three kids. Charlene has two jobs, a full-time job and a part-time job, and her husband has a full-time job. They try to do the laundry and cooking during off-peak hours but their work schedules and their kids make it pretty hard to have that happen. Every month they end up with a \$400 hydro bill and a disconnection notice. They're living off their overdraft. When I met Charlene, she was almost in tears.

Can the Premier tell Charlene, and people like her all across Ontario, what she thinks she should be doing about it?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There are two issues in that question that the leader of the third party raised, the first being that electricity prices are very burdensome for many people across the province. I recognize that. I have spoken with people like Charlene, the person the leader of the third party references, and I recognize that on top of what we have already done—the latest thing is the 8% reduction that is on all bills now—we need to do more. I have committed that we will bring forward a plan to further reduce electricity bills before the budget.

On the disconnection issue, I've been very clear: It's unacceptable. We've had a piece of legislation before the House. The Minister of Energy has been reaching out to local distribution companies. Most LDCs have already got the message; there are no disconnections in the majority of them. If there are any outstanding by midnight tonight, we will bring forward a stand-alone piece of legislation to ban that practice.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I've talked with people who get to the end of the month and have to decide between buying the groceries and paying the hydro bill to keep the lights on. This is 2017 and we live in a province with huge potential. Nobody should be faced with that sort of choice.

What does the Premier expect people to do?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I've said, I know that there are people in Ontario who are struggling with their

electricity bills. I know that. We have been working very hard, and by that I mean we've been meeting with organizations, with individuals, whether it's the Minister of Energy or me or my staff. We've been looking for solutions that can make real changes in the electricity system that are sustainable, that over time will continue to reduce electricity costs and in the immediate term will give relief across the board, because we know that the investments that we have made in the system to make it clean, to make it reliable, to make it a system that everyone can count on across the province—there was a cost associated with those changes. We need to take more costs out of the system, we need to reduce those bills, and that's exactly the proposal that we will bring forward before the budget.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, people are hurting and the Liberal government still doesn't seem to get it. They won't stop the sell-off of Hydro One which is going to make things even worse here in Ontario. The Premier, in fact, said that the only way to build transit was with money, so she sold off Hydro One to get that money, the hydro money. Now we're hearing that she's going to take money from schools, from hospitals and from transit to subsidize hydro. No wonder people are cynical, Speaker.

1100

When is the Premier going to start fixing the problems that people face rather than the problems that the Liberal Party faces, stop the sell-off of Hydro One and begin fixing our electricity system?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the leader of the third party knows that there is absolutely no relationship between the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One and electricity prices. I know she knows that. What she's trying to do is conflate those issues and make it sound as though somehow there is a connection.

Then she's setting up the next piece of her strategy, which is that anything we do is going to be to the detriment of something else in government—not true, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that we are investing in transit. We must invest in transit in order to foster economic growth in this province. At the same time, we need to deal with electricity prices, which have increased across the board because of the investments that we have made over the last number of years to make sure that our grid is clean and that it's reliable.

We're going to continue to reduce electricity costs.

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Premier, Speaker: If the Premier wanted to stop people from having their hydro cut off, she could do that. I already said that to the Premier. Instead, she won't do it unless she also gets her way on a 158-page omnibus bill, or the latest political grandstanding by her Minister of Energy.

Can the Premier explain why political credit is more important than stopping people from having their hydro cut off?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. It's extremely important to me that we have action on this. That's why it was included in the bill that was before the House in June.

We've said very clearly that if all of the LDCs—the local distribution companies—in the province have not moved to stop winter disconnections by midnight tonight, then we will bring forward a stand-alone piece of legislation, which I hope would get expeditious passage in this House. That would then be the rule: that there will be no winter disconnections across the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier had an opportunity just a few minutes ago to pull that section out of Bill 27 and pass it today, not tomorrow. She had that opportunity a few minutes ago, but because it was coming from the opposition, not from the government, she refused to do it. It appears that the Premier will only agree to keeping people's power on if she and her Liberal Party get the political win. Shame on her.

Can this Premier explain to someone facing a disconnection notice in the province of Ontario why she's putting the interests of her political party—the Liberal Party—before the interests of Ontarians?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The point is a procedural one. The reality is that it amounts to exactly the same thing: that people across the province will no longer be subjected to disconnection orders. My expectation, actually, would be that by midnight tonight, all of the LDCs would have agreed to stop this practice, so that neither piece of legislation is actually necessary because they will already be in compliance.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It should not be about the whim or the good nature of the utilities. It should be the law in the province of Ontario that people's electricity does not get cut off. That is her job; that is her responsibility. It's not up to the companies.

Last year, 60,000 people had their hydro cut off. Suddenly today, facing immense political pressure, the Premier has apparently seen the light—well, not the light today; maybe the light tomorrow.

Once again, this is politics at its worst. That's what this Liberal Premier dishes up regularly in this province. That's why the people of Ontario are so disappointed and so fed up with the Liberal Party and this Premier. When is she going to start making decisions that are based on the best interests of the people of Ontario and not the best interests of her Liberal Party?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I would say to the leader of the third party that this issue was before the House in June. The leader of the third party did not make an issue of this in June, nor did she work to expedite the piece of legislation. This is of great concern to us, which is why the Minister of Energy has communicated with all of the local distribution companies in the province and has said that winter disconnections are unacceptable. My expectation is that they will be in

compliance by midnight. If that's not the case, we will bring a piece of legislation tomorrow to make that the case if we get expeditious approval by the House.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question's to the Premier. Speaker, three-year-old Madison Ambos's family has to raise over \$140,000 to receive life-changing surgery out-of-country. This government has created a rationed health care system through their scandals and mismanagement, and Madison and many other children are unable to access the health care they need. Instead, families are left on their own to rely on the generosity of others to raise the much-needed funds to travel out-of-country.

The Premier and Minister of Health already know the results of the recommendations from their expert panel regarding this surgery. Families cannot wait any longer on OHIP's dithering. Will the Premier direct her minister to fund Madison's surgery today?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: First of all, let me just say that I can imagine no more trying and tragic situation than a family that has an ill child looking for support and looking for procedures that will alleviate that child's suffering. There just is no worse situation I can imagine.

The reality is that in Ontario we have a health care system that is based on evidence, that looks at the scientific evidence behind procedures. I don't know the specifics of the case of Madison, but I will certainly make sure that any information the member gives me will be passed on to the Minister of Health. But in situations where there is not a surgery available here in Ontario, and it is available elsewhere, if it's something that is supported by evidence, then there is support for that surgery out of country. But the decisions we make in Ontario have to be based on medical evidence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Back to the Premier. This isn't an experimental surgery. This is actually a surgery that's covered by the ministry website. However, the ministry does not fund it in Ontario. The red tape and the layers of management they have created in the health care system have made it an impossible nightmare for Madison's family to actually apply for the financial assistance the Premier is just referring to.

This surgery, again, is not experimental, and it is an approved surgery on the ministry's website. Her minister is unwilling to fund the surgery in Ontario. Will the Premier make a commitment today to fund the surgery when Madison goes to St. Louis?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, what I'd like to do is to get the information from the member opposite. I will say that in my own constituency office, I can remember situations where there was a need to connect a family with the ministry and with the minister's office to have a further conversation. I'm quite happy to do that

for the member opposite, and I would like to have the information. I just don't have enough information.

It's interesting to me that it is something that is covered, but is not being funded. I'm not sure how that is happening, and what the questions or concerns are around this particular situation. I'll need more information. I'll certainly take it up with the Ministry of Health, and I appreciate the member opposite raising it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question. The member from—the member from—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You know this, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You're going to make me do this, aren't you?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: After 28 years, you've got to get it right. Sorry, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I am sorry to the member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: All right. It was just bad humour on my part.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The serious question is to the Premier. Every party in this House has expressed support for legislation to stop winter disconnects, but the Premier refused to support Andrea Horwath's motion this morning that would have dealt with it first thing today. Instead, she would rather hold those vulnerable people hostage, refusing to help people and, rather, help the Liberal Party.

My question is this: Why is it that you always choose to do what's good for the Liberal Party and not necessarily what's good for the people of Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: We brought forward this issue back in June. We wanted to address this issue in the spring. Now we're getting close to that again, but unfortunately the opposition parties didn't want to play nice on this one. We could have had this passed by then.

But we've now acted. I've written a letter to all the LDCs asking them to comply with no more winter disconnects. We sent that letter out last week and we have a majority of those LDCs acting on that and respecting that right now.

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However, if a few LDCs don't act by midnight tonight, we are more than happy to bring forward legislation that will end this winter disconnection program as soon as this legislation is passed, and we expect we would get support from the opposition on this.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier: This House couldn't deal with it in June, why? Because you prorogued the House in June. Who are you trying to kid?

The issue here is very simple. We've been pointing out since last November that people are being disconnected. We've asked for legislation that was introduced—a motion this morning by my leader, to fast-track

legislation—so we can deal with it today. Instead, what do you do? You say, “Oh, no, no. I don’t want to do it and give anybody else credit. I’ve got to do it so I can help the Liberal Party get some good press tomorrow. So we’re going to wait for another day and we’re going to do what’s good for the Liberal Party.”

I’m going to ask you once again: Why does it always come down to what’s good for the Liberal Party and not good for the people of Ontario?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I need to remind the honourable member that the prorogation happened on a Thursday and we were back on the Monday in September. They could have easily passed this bill then. But again, I know there are alternative facts on the other side. On this side of the House, we recognized that this was an issue for the people of Ontario in June. Why didn’t they, Mr. Speaker? They need to ask themselves why they didn’t see that back in June when we did as a government. We made sure that this bill was brought forward, making sure that we can end winter disconnects. Unfortunately they played political games with it, not this side of the House.

We’ve now made sure that there will be no more disconnects by all LDCs complying with the letter that I sent. We will know by midnight tonight, and if there are a few that don’t comply, we will make sure the law of the land will make them comply.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Arthur Potts: My question is to the Minister of Research, Innovation and Science. A key promise of our government’s mandate was to create high-quality and high-paying jobs for Ontarians. To do that, the Minister of Research, Innovation and Science has made a number of very strategic investments to grow the innovation economy.

At a time when the term “bailout” was being used frivolously by members of the opposition, this government made the strategic decision to loan MaRS the capital they needed to finish their innovative research hub.

If the opposition had their way, MaRS would be a gigantic sinkhole at the corner of University and College, or maybe have been sold off to the private sector at an incredible loss. This government showed an immense amount of leadership in the face of very ardent criticism, and that leadership has paid off, Speaker.

I would like to ask, would the minister please inform this House on the very great successes of the MaRS Discovery District?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member from Beaches—East York for that very important question.

It is my distinct pleasure to inform the members of this House that the decision to bridge-finance MaRS has been

an incredible success. The MaRS Discovery District loan will be paid three years ahead of time at zero cost to the people of Ontario—paid off with interest.

Thanks to our investment, MaRS has created over 6,000 jobs and is responsible for an increase in our annual GDP of \$1 billion. It has attracted leading technology firms that are opening innovation labs right here in the city of Toronto.

I want to take a moment and thank the Premier for her extraordinary leadership in investing in the future of the economy of this province. Its impact will be seen for years and decades to come in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Trinity—Spadina.

Mr. Han Dong: Minister, this is great news for our government’s efforts to build a globally competitive innovation hub here in Trinity—Spadina. I’m pleased to hear that MaRS is not only paying off its loan but has also become a commercial success.

As I recall, the opposition were quite short-sighted in their criticism of this project. I was very glad that our government didn’t take their advice on this matter and made this investment happen despite the political risk involved.

Minister, can you advise this House as to why this investment and others like it are important to Ontario’s efforts in becoming a world leader in innovation?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The member is absolutely correct. The Leader of the Opposition once blatantly called MaRS a money pit and a bad fiscal decision. Today we see, Mr. Speaker, just how ill-informed and misguided he was. Ontario is emerging as a global strength, as an innovation leader, and key to those efforts to transform Ontario to a new global economy is a strong and healthy MaRS. MaRS is a true success story that is helping to establish Ontario as a force to be reckoned with in the global innovation economy.

Our decision to boldly press ahead to build the MaRS tower in the face of unrelenting political opposition has proven today to be the right decision. I want to thank our Premier and my colleagues for having the courage to step up in the face of political risk and opposition rhetoric. We place building a strong economy and creating new jobs ahead of partisan politics.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Todd Smith: My question this morning is for the Premier. On Friday last week, Bacardi announced that it was closing its Brampton location due to the changing business environment and to ensure the company’s future competitiveness.

My question, Speaker, is this: How many more jobs have to leave Ontario before this Premier does something about the electricity crisis that she and her government have created in Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, any time a job is lost in this province, we are concerned for the workers that are involved, and we will continue to reach out to those workers to ensure that we do everything we can to help them find alternative employment.

But the member has got to deal with the facts. We've created almost 700,000 net new jobs here in this province since the recession. The unemployment rate in Ontario is at the lowest level it's been in eight years. We are outpacing the G7 in growth. That means we're growing faster than the US, faster than Italy, faster than the UK, faster than France, faster than Germany, faster than Japan. Mr. Speaker, we're leading this country in growth. We will continue to do that to ensure any of those workers impacted will have alternative employment for them to be able to pick up where they've left off.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: Speaker, we've lost 350,000 manufacturing jobs in the province of Ontario since this government took office. Electricity is a crisis situation here in Ontario, and this minister, this Premier and this government don't seem to get it. They are the reason that the business climate is where it's at in Ontario. There is a smattering of applause over there, because I don't think the Liberal caucus even believes the numbers that the minister just put out there.

This company, Bacardi, had operated in Brampton for almost 50 years: an international business. They said the business environment and competitiveness has challenges in Ontario—this after the government just gave them \$350,000 last year so they could keep the lights on. If the Premier doesn't want to blame her electricity costs, which we all know is a problem, which of her government's other policies does she believe is responsible for the uncompetitive business environment in Ontario?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, how dare the member opposite talk down our manufacturing sector when we're up 5,700 net new jobs since last year alone? We're proud that we've invested \$1.9 billion in support for Ontario manufacturers. That has leveraged \$18 billion in private sector support. It has helped to create or retain over 80,000 jobs.

Where was the member opposite when we made those investments? He was on the exact other side, opposing every cent that we invested in this sector.

We're going to keep investing in our manufacturing sector. We're going to ensure we have one of the most competitive manufacturing sectors in North America, and we're going to keep growing jobs in that sector, Mr. Speaker.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. Under the transit funding formula that was put in place by Bill Davis, the province paid 50% of the TTC's operating costs. The Davis funding formula helped make the TTC the envy of the world.

1120

The Progressive Conservative government cut that funding in 1998, and the funding has stayed cut under the Liberal government. Instead, the government has offered indirect funding with the gas tax, at a fraction of the previous funding.

Will the Premier help make the TTC the envy of the world again? Will she restore the TTC operating funding, as proposed by the NDP?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I thank the member from Toronto—Danforth for the question. I think that member will know that at the current time, our government is investing more in public transit in the city of Toronto, in the 416, than any other government in provincial history.

He cited in his question that not that many weeks ago, the Premier announced that over the next four years, we'll be doubling the amount of gas tax money that cities like Toronto receive. That means, for the city of Toronto, an estimated additional \$170 million rolled out by 2022, per year. That will bring their total to roughly \$340 million.

That's on top of the literally billions of dollars that we are currently investing—again, more than any other government in Ontario history—in the expansion of transit in the city of Toronto, in the 905 communities around Toronto, and in the 99 communities across Ontario that are eligible to receive gas tax funding.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, it's great for ribbon cutting, but it's real tough when you're in an un-air-conditioned subway car in the middle of summer.

Under the province's traditional 50-50 funding formula, the TTC and Wheel-Trans would have received about \$345 million in direct provincial funding, based on Toronto's most recently passed budget. With this level of provincial funding, the TTC could improve service, boost ridership and give people another good reason to leave their car at home.

Provincial funding for transit operations would allow for fare integration across the GTA. It would allow us to avoid the Metrolinx proposal to charge people from Etobicoke and Scarborough for the distance that they travel.

Will the Premier restore direct provincial funding for TTC operations, as the NDP has proposed?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: As I mentioned in my first answer, as we are standing here today, this provincial government, under the leadership of Premier Wynne, is investing billions of dollars in the city of Toronto alone: for example, \$3.7 billion in the 416 for GO regional express rail; \$416 million for the Toronto streetcars; \$870 million for the Spadina subway extension; \$5.3 billion for the Eglinton Crosstown, the single largest transit construction project in Ontario history.

But interestingly, from my perspective as Minister of Transportation, when Andrea Horwath, the leader of the NDP, talked about providing support for the city of

Toronto's transit, she was completely silent about the transit needs of every other community across the province of Ontario.

That's why our initiative doubles gas tax money for nearly 100 communities, in every corner of this province. That's transit leadership. That's getting the job done right.

TVONTARIO

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Education.

Minister, TVO is truly one of our province's gems, one that we in this Legislature, and all Ontarians, can all be truly proud of. Over the last several weeks, I've heard from many constituents about the importance of TVO to their families. Whether it's TVOKids, educational platforms, in-depth current affairs shows or documentaries, TVO plays an important part in their everyday lives.

Most were concerned, over the last couple of weeks, about the potential loss of over-the-air transmission and the impact that that would have on those who did not have access to, or who could not afford, cable and Internet.

Minister, could you please let this Legislature know about the additional support that was provided to TVO in last Friday's announcement?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member from Ottawa South for his advocacy on behalf of his constituents.

We heard that Ontarians value TVO's dynamic educational programming. Someone talked about Polkaroo. We all love Polkaroo. That's why our government has stepped in and taken steps to ensure that we can continue to enjoy this programming in these communities.

This additional investment by our government of \$1 million will help TVO to continue to be accessible over the air in Ottawa, Belleville, Thunder Bay, Chatham, Cloyne, Kitchener, London and Windsor. This investment builds on the support that the Ministry of Education already provides to TVO for their innovative educational products and learning tools for students across Ontario.

We support TVO, and that's why we've committed to this.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to thank the minister for that answer, and I'd like to thank the minister for listening to the concerns that I expressed on behalf of my constituents. It's not just myself; I know that the member from Ottawa Centre and many members of the Legislature raised this. It really is a very important part of people's everyday lives.

We've all been impacted and touched by TVO—those of us who have had kids or who are young enough to have been impacted by shows. I'm a little older, so I remember my kids' shows. Although I really enjoy The Agenda, I have to say that I have a personal affinity for Polkaroo—as many of us do here; I can hear it in the Legislature.

I'm really pleased to hear that over-the-air transmission will be continued. I think it's an important part of equal access. But I also know that TVO was also the educational extension of the Ministry of Education's effort to educate our children. I'd like the minister to please talk to us about the support we have for the technical extension of Ontario's education.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you again to the member from Ottawa South.

We continue to assist TVO in providing innovative educational products. I just heard from the member from Ottawa Centre that his two children watch TVOKids, and that's really terrific.

For 2016-17, the organization received more than \$48 million to better support the learning needs of all of our students. This includes support for TVO's Homework Help, which is free, online math tutoring by teachers for students in grades 7 to 10; mPower, a new math learning tool for kindergarten to grade 6 students based on Ontario's math curriculum that is supporting our renewed math strategy; and the provision of distance learning education through its Independent Learning Centre, the ILC.

We will continue to support TVO so that it can deliver innovative programs to support 21st-century learning for all students, so that they can have the talents and the skills needed to thrive in today's global economy.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is also to the Minister of Education. The minister was in eastern Ontario last month visiting Upper Canada District School Board schools targeted for closure. She told local media she was confident the board's accommodation review process would create better learning opportunities for students. I want to provide her with an update.

Last week, the final report recommended closing seven schools in Leeds-Grenville—12 overall. That's one in four of the elementary schools that the board has in my riding. It's a disaster for rural education in these communities. Does the minister actually believe that closing so many schools is creating better learning opportunities for students?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member opposite for this question.

During the wintertime, I had an opportunity to travel across this province. I do that because it's what I love to do the most, which is to visit schools, talk to students and talk to educators. I visited Glengarry, Ottawa, Cornwall, Sault Ste. Marie and Thunder Bay, just to name a few.

I had a chance to see first-hand how investments in programming for students like specialist high-skills majors are allowing students to learn the skills that align with their unique learning styles and their interests. Every student in Ontario deserves to have access to the best education possible so that they can reach their full potential. That is why we support the local boards as they are making decisions to strengthen their programming for

students, and that includes having meaningful input from communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the minister: Her answer was unbelievable. Ontario's Minister of Education is sitting on the sidelines talking platitudes while the future of rural education is being totally dismantled. As I feared, the ridiculous process that she's so confident in ignored alternatives brought forward by school communities in my riding. They're actually proposing to close two schools in the two fastest-growing communities in Leeds-Grenville.

I called for a moratorium on school closures last fall to give us time to develop a provincial rural education strategy. You know, it's hard to plan for the future of rural education when there's no tomorrow for these schools.

1130

Speaker, my question is simple: Will the minister act before it's too late by stopping these closures and forming an all-party committee to set up solutions for keeping rural schools open?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I want to stress to the member opposite that every student in this province deserves to have access to the best education possible so that they can achieve their full potential. Our students in rural areas are an integral part of that.

We understand that boards are moving forward. There are no easy solutions. With the pupil accommodation review process, boards are required to receive input from municipalities, from coterminous boards, from community members, from students, from parents and from their local organizations, and that's exactly what they're doing.

We cannot have a one-size-fits-all solution to this issue. It has to be a local decision, and that's why we support the pupil accommodation review process and we support local boards in making that decision.

At the same time, we are providing the investments in our education system that are necessary to ensure that our students have the best possible investments in their education.

EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Premier. Ontarians are concerned about proposed public sector CEO pay hikes that could see some executive salaries increase by 50%. These high-priced executives, who are already making six figures, are going to see their salaries increase by hundreds of thousands of dollars each year.

Most Ontarians haven't seen a real pay increase in years. A lot of Ontarians can't pay, for example, their hydro bills.

It makes you wonder what this government's real priorities are, and if they would rather spend limited

public dollars on high-priced executives than on supporting needed public services.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Obviously, when we think about our partners in the broader public sector, we want to make sure that we have two things happening. We want to make sure that our partners in the broader public sector can pay their executives adequately and that they can attract the best people, because we want the best people running our public services. But we also understand that they need to pay the broader public sector in a responsible manner and to get good value for money.

I would point out that the group of people we are talking about with broader public sector pay, or in this group of broader public executives, have actually had their salaries frozen since 2012.

The issue that we have looked at has been, how do we come out of the freeze in a responsible way? The way we do that is to make sure they are paying no more than the 50%—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: Speaker, years of Liberal austerity budgets have underfunded our hospitals and schools to the point of crisis. Funding for the front-line staff who make a difference in people's lives has been cut, possibly to make way for massive CEO pay hikes. This is money that could be used for hiring back the 16,000 nurses who have lost their jobs in the last two years as a result of damaging Liberal spending priorities.

When will this government stop letting the people of Ontario down and invest in programs and services that matter to Ontario families?

Hon. Liz Sandals: For the BPS executives who have had their salary frozen, the organizations have been asked to set out a salary framework where they are compared to Canadian public sector comparatives. They are not legally allowed to pay more than the midpoint of those comparators.

If in fact they have reasonable comparators and reasonable salary increases, we will approve that. If they have unreasonable comparators that don't comply with the regulation, we'll send them back to the drawing board. That has happened. If they have unreasonable increases, we will send them back to the drawing board.

We are only going to approve those salary increases which are reasonable and allow us to get good value for money and good people to run our public services.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Daiene Vernile: My question is for the Minister of International Trade. With recent world events taking shape, we're beginning to see a shift in the trade landscape, especially here in North America. Ontario does have a long history, with our partners in the United States and Mexico, of strong and mutually beneficial trade relations that are measured through our deeply integrated

economies. This economic integration has largely come as a result of trade deals like NAFTA, which now links 450 million people, producing over US\$20 trillion worth of goods and services every year. NAFTA effectively eliminated almost all tariffs on goods and provided clear rules that govern trade in goods, services and investment throughout the continent.

Speaker, given the fact that the new US administration has vowed to tweak NAFTA, could the minister please elaborate on what this is going to mean for businesses here in Ontario?

Hon. Michael Chan: I want to thank the honourable member from Kitchener Centre for asking this important question.

As minister responsible for international trade, my job is to sell Ontario while at the same time ensuring access to our existing key markets.

Simply put, Ontario supports free trade and understands the value of our NAFTA partners.

Speaker, we have a 24/7 pipeline of communication with the federal government to ensure Ontario's interests are at the forefront of any negotiation. Recently, Prime Minister Trudeau met with the US administration for the very first time. All indications point to the notion that both countries value our similarities and that deepening our trade relationship is mutually beneficial for now, the medium term and long term.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: It's very encouraging to hear that our Minister of International Trade and our government have been actively engaged with our NAFTA partners. The Premier should also be commended for taking action to name a dedicated committee for Ontario-US economic and trade relations.

Last month, our Premier also issued letters to 27 governors of American states that rank Ontario as a top customer, spotlighting the positive impact that our trade creates for workers on both sides of the border.

However, face-to-face engagements are where meaningful connections are made. That's why our Premier has committed to asserting her presence in key US states, beginning in March.

Speaker, could the minister please give us more insight on the direction that Ontario needs to take from a trade perspective in order to continue competing globally?

Hon. Michael Chan: NAFTA has always been the greatest pillar of growth for our three countries. Since its implementation, the total GDP for Canada, US and Mexico reached \$US20.7 trillion in 2015.

Speaker, we will continue to work with our NAFTA partners to deepen our relationships, but we must also diversify. Diversification in trade is twofold: We must diversify our trade to include new emerging markets like Brazil, India and China, and in our established trading markets, we must diversify the sectors and regions with which we trade.

Speaker, our government is committed to working with businesses to reduce trade risk and to help Ontario protect and promote its strong economy.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Norm Miller: Mr. Speaker, I'd first like to point out that the Minister of Energy said we voted against Bill 27. We actually supported Bill 27.

My question is to the Premier. Muskoka Meats and 100 Mile Store is a small business in my riding. It's just the kind of business you'd like to see succeed in Ontario. They promote high-quality local food. I can attest to the quality of the delicious Ontario lamb they sell myself.

Unfortunately, the owner, Dave Purdon, is struggling to replenish his stock after being forced to launch a half-price sale of frozen meats on Facebook in order to pay his hydro bill and keep his business running. As a butcher, Dave knows that his freezers require substantial electricity to run. However, when faced with a \$1,700 hydro bill and a \$5,000 security deposit, he had no option but to sell his quality products at a loss.

1140

Speaker, will the Premier explain how she expects small rural businesses like Dave's to succeed and prosper while paying Ontario's outrageous hydro rates?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I thank the honourable member for the question. The important thing for us, as the government, to recognize is—you know what, Mr. Speaker, we put forward a few programs to help small businesses, and they're actually seeing help when they know about those programs, so we're going to continue to promote those programs and make sure that those businesses can find out that information and save those dollars, because I do hope that the honourable member let that company know about many of those programs.

But as the Premier has said quite a few times, Mr. Speaker, we've come forward with programs. We've had that 8% reduction that's just been in place since January 1. That 8% reduction applies to all retail price plan customers, which includes farms, which includes small businesses and includes residents. That 8% is coming off the bill, but we know we need to do more. We'll continue to work hard at that and we'll make sure that we find other ways to help those businesses.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Huron-Bruce.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Snobelen Farms is a local Huron-Bruce grain-drying operation and exporter supporting good rural jobs. On Snobelen's January hydro bill, there was a delivery charge of \$9,006 before HST, while their electricity cost was \$3,312.

Speaker, Snobelen Farms wants the Premier to listen and understand—this is very, very important—that if she doesn't start standing up for Ontario businesses, the only thing drying up in this province will be more good-paying jobs. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier admit that her careless spending is perpetuating the ongoing gouging of Ontario businesses through her outrageous delivery charges?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Minister of economic trade.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, we're proud of the investments we've made with Ontario small businesses through the years. I wish the opposition would have been as supportive of small businesses when we made those investments.

Our regional economic development funds have seen us invest \$145 million. That's leveraged \$1.7 billion of private sector investments and created and supported 35,000 jobs in small businesses in eastern Ontario and southwestern Ontario, areas that have struggled to keep up with Ontario's burgeoning economy.

We've also made Ontario one of the most competitive places for small businesses to operate. We've cut the capital tax out. We've reduced corporate taxes from 5.5% to 4.5%. That saved businesses \$4.5 billion. Our corporate income tax is 13% lower than the average US—that's saving significant amounts of money. We brought in the HST, saving \$4.7 billion. This is the most competitive jurisdiction in North America for small, medium and large businesses to operate. We're going to keep growing, Mr. Speaker. It's—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

New question.

EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question, of course, is to the Premier. Premier, last month StatsCan data revealed that women in this province are far more precariously employed than men. Women are less likely to be employed than men. Women between age 24 and 55 are employed at a rate 10% lower than men. Women are roughly twice as likely to be working in part-time jobs and more likely than men to have to work multiple jobs.

To add insult to injury, Premier, full-time working women in Ontario earn \$167 less per week than their male counterparts across all industries. We know this because it comes from Stats Canada, their 2016 survey.

What Ontarians don't know is why the Premier doesn't have a plan to address employment inequality. Premier, why don't you have a plan to address this serious issue?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of the Status of Women.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you so much for this question. I want to really say that this is a very important issue for all of us. As we all know, women make up more than 50% of the workforce in Ontario, and so they are key players when it comes to building our economy in Ontario. Because of that important role, they are contributing to a healthy economy, and we're committed to ensuring there are economic opportunities for women and all Ontarians.

In fact, we're doing a number of different things. We support programs that help low-income women gain new skills and new opportunities, such as the Women in

Skilled Trades and Information Technology Training Program that has trained more than 2,600 women. We also have a micro-lending program for women in Ontario which is designed to help low-income women. The Employment Training for Abused/At-Risk Women Program helps women who are facing challenges in their lives. And we're doing so much more to promote gender equality and address the gender wage gap. Of course, I'm more than happy to talk about how child care is assisting with that too.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds—Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: I just saw Bruce Davis in the gallery. I know he has been introduced before, but he does brew great beer at the Gananoque Brewing Company, so I want to make sure I introduce him.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke on a point of order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I apologize; I missed this earlier. Joining the group from Equal Voice and Daughters of the Vote today, from my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, we have Martina Witt. Welcome to Queen's Park, Martina.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I do want to remind all members that a request has been put out by Equal Voice and Daughters of the Vote that we are having a major photography opportunity on the staircase. Everyone is invited to attend and partner with them so that they can be sent to Ottawa as our Ontario representatives for the model Parliament. I just put that reminder out to you.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1146 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'd like to introduce Myriam Faucher from my riding of Nipissing, hometown of Corbeil. She's here with Equal Voice and the Daughters of the Vote.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to introduce David Sanders, Suleman Basharat, Jemilie Adajar, Patrice Callaghan, Jamuna Kakunthan, Terry-Anne Morle and Anne Cuevas. All of these striking food service workers are from U of T Scarborough and York University. Welcome to the Legislature.

Hon. Reza Moridi: Please join me in welcoming Ms. Sussan Ekrami, founder of Nowruz Foundation, visiting the House today. Welcome.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Welcome back, Speaker. A lovely young lady from my riding, Marcaila Taylor, is here with the Daughters of the Vote today as well. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Granville Anderson: Speaker, join me in welcoming Nikki Clarke from the Black History Society. She has some other guests along with her as well. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions? Seeing no further introductions, it's now time for members' statements.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Sorry. I just got a last wave at the last second, just in time. The Minister of Education.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I too want to welcome the guests who are here today. I see Liben from the Taibu Community Health Centre in Scarborough is here, and other colleagues from the board as well. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Now it is time for members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

VISIT TO ISRAEL

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Over the winter break, I was able to join a number of MPPs on an instructional and quite emotional visit to Israel. And no, Speaker, there were no taxpayers' dollars involved. Thanks to the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs for hosting our group.

Sara Lefton, Madi Murariu and Rachel Chertkoff gave us great insight into the past and current situation involving both Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Our guide, Lyana Rotstein, gave us a detailed profile and analysis over the course of the eight-day trip to Jerusalem, the Golan Heights overlooking Syria and Tel Aviv. We heard from political scientists, Canadian embassy representatives, the former Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, journalists from all sides, security experts, members of Parliament, various ministry staff and several high-tech companies.

Thanks to their collective depth of knowledge and ability to share this information, what I knew going in and what I knew when I left are two very different things. This was an important and informative event for me and, I'm sure, for my colleagues as well.

DAUGHTERS OF THE VOTE

Ms. Catherine Fife: I am thankful that I have a mother who encouraged me to challenge the status quo and encouraged me to enter politics. I am thankful for women who march and women who mentor. I'm thankful for leaders who challenge misogyny, individuals who hold established powers to account and organizations such as Equal Voice that are working to change the political landscape for the better. I am thankful for Daughters of the Vote who will experience the emotions and energy of politics and, because of this experience,

will not allow gendered barriers such as harassment to interfere with this intense call to public service.

I see ambition, assertiveness and restlessness in these daughters, and it inspires. I see it in all of you even when you don't see it yourselves: the power of a principled voice, the drive for real change. I see in these Daughters of the Vote hope: hope as we establish male allies for equality; hope for a society where every child, regardless of gender, race, religion, creed or economic status, can reach their potential; hope for an electoral system where every vote will count and women will see themselves reflected in the governments they elect and where women's rights are not debated for politic points.

I see the Daughters of the Vote as the beginning of this movement towards equality and justice. I am thankful for this small but mighty revolution. It is long overdue and just in time.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Granville Anderson: I rise today to tell you about how grateful I am that the province officially recognizes February as Black History Month. Personally, I am grateful because it reinforces the pride and satisfaction I have about the many important contributions the black community has made to Durham region, to the province and to our great country.

Over the course of the month, I have had the pleasure of attending various events in my riding of Durham as well as throughout Durham region to celebrate Black History Month and its significance in our community. I am so proud of our tradition of gathering to celebrate the hard work and contributions of black people to the province of Ontario.

There are so many examples of the contributions made to Ontario by people from the Caribbean and African diaspora. I personally think of Lincoln Alexander, the first black MP, the first black cabinet minister and the first black Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, and of Leonard Braithwaite, the first black MPP, elected in 1963, paving the way for people like me.

From a cultural perspective, our community has groups such as the Canadian Jamaican Club, Club Carib and UOIT's African Students Association, to name a few, that have done so much to celebrate the vibrant black culture we have in the riding of Durham. These groups and the many more exemplary black individuals we have in Durham have helped to build a stronger region and province, and we should be proud to celebrate that throughout this month and throughout the rest of the year.

CHINESE NEW YEAR

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Gong Hay Fat Choy.

On behalf of the Ontario PC caucus and our leader, Patrick Brown, I want to take this opportunity to offer warmest wishes to everyone celebrating the lunar new year.

The Year of the Rooster officially began January 28, so for the last several weeks, festivities have been under way for Canadians of Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese heritage. Many of my colleagues and I had the opportunity to participate in celebrations across Ontario. As always, it has been an honour to be a part of the wonderful traditions of Chinese New Year, Seollal and Tet.

While the form of the celebration may differ from culture to culture and place to place, it is always an occasion for communities to gather, enjoy wonderful food, express gratitude and celebrate the opportunity of a new beginning. Here in Ontario, the spring festival enriches our culture, brightens our winter and reminds us of how blessed we are by the diversity of Ontario.

I hope this Year of the Rooster will bring happiness, health and prosperity for all.

Remarks in Mandarin and Vietnamese.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Last Friday, I decided I would let people know by way of Facebook that the Legislature was coming back and encourage people to send me their stories in regard to what's happening with their hydro bills. Mr. Speaker, it is unbelievable—the anger that people express when they're communicating their frustration with hydro is beyond the pale. I'm not going to read word for word, but there's a couple that I thought I would share.

One particular individual says that, aside from what's happening in his house where his hydro bill has gone up in price, he's a volunteer at a Kamiskotia ski hill. To pay the hydro to run the ski hill is getting to the point where will the ski hill remain open? He raises the issue of what happens to arenas. Keeping arenas open in small communities across Ontario so our kids can go out and skate, play hockey and do figure skating is getting to be quite onerous because of the price of electricity.

I have another lady who writes to me and says, "My hydro bill used to be about \$250 a month." Bianca Duhn says her bill was about \$250 a month, somewhere around there. The long and the short of the story: She's not electrically heated; she's heated by gas. But she uses a pellet stove in order to save on that. Her hydro bill was \$420 last month, compared to what it used to be.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. We have got to do something to bring hydro prices down, because people have had it. They can't pay it any more.

1510

BANGLADESHI COMMUNITY

Mr. Arthur Potts: At midnight last night, I found myself on Danforth Avenue, in my great riding of Beaches—East York, celebrating with my Bangladeshi community. You may know that Bangla is the second-largest first language spoken in my riding. I was there with representatives from the federal government, Bill Blair and my own counterpart Nathaniel Erskine-Smith.

Mayor John Tory took the time to show up. It was fantastic to have them out there in support of the community.

Earlier in the day, I was at a centre called the Bangladesh Centre and Community Services with my good friend the Minister of Research, Innovation and Science. It was wonderful to have him there to celebrate with Dr. Reza Mahbub and Hasina Quader, who is the executive director. Dr. Moridi was the keynote speaker. He was so appropriate to be there because this is the individual who, in a private member's bill a number of years ago, had us recognize unanimously in this House International Mother Language Day.

Earlier in the day, I was out in Scarborough with the Bangladesh Literary Resource Centre and Subrata Kumar Das. There, I had a chance to speak at length about the trials that indigenous people have faced in our country, where we too tried to remove culture from our indigenous people by depriving them of the right to speak in their language. This is what faced the people in Bangladesh when the Pakistani government said that the official language would be Urdu; you'll be hearing more about that later.

I just wanted to rise to say thank you to the community for the great support they had in recognizing mother languages all across this world.

Remarks in Bangla.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Steve Clark: It wasn't much of a Family Day for parents from seven elementary schools in my riding. That's because they didn't spend the day having fun with their children. Instead, they worked on presentations to save their children's schools from being closed by the Upper Canada District School Board. Unfortunately, that's not new for them.

Parents have spent thousands of hours away from their families since the board's accommodation review process began last fall. They've done incredible work developing ideas to keep our rural schools viable. But as I feared when this process began, they were ignored. Last week the board tabled recommendations that would devastate rural education in Leeds—Grenville.

If trustees approve this short-sighted plan next month, seven elementary schools in my riding will close. That's one in four of the board's elementary schools in Leeds—Grenville. That's right, Speaker: one in four.

Today, on behalf of these communities that stand to lose so much, I'm calling on the Minister of Education to put a stop to this. It's time to get off the sidelines, Minister, and stop professing confidence in this ridiculous process. She must act immediately and put a moratorium on school closures. We need a provincial strategy on the future of rural education, but we can't plan for the future if this minister does nothing and allows trustees to close schools today. For seven school communities in my riding, there is no tomorrow.

ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION
SCARBOROUGH CENTENNIAL
BRANCH 614

Ms. Soo Wong: I rise today to share an important milestone in Scarborough-Agincourt. This Saturday, February 25, the Royal Canadian Legion Scarborough Centennial Branch 614 will be celebrating their 50th anniversary.

The Royal Canadian Legion is Canada's largest veteran support and community service organization. With over 400 branches across Ontario alone, the Royal Canadian Legion advocates on behalf of veterans, including serving military and RCMP members. Since 1967, branch 614 has been a central community partner in providing support for Scarborough veterans, many of whom valiantly served Canada in World War II. Branch 614 is over 400 members strong and one of the most diverse Legions in Canada.

I recently met with veterans who served under the British in Hong Kong during the Second World War. They included John Fung, the chairman of the Hong Kong Ex-Servicemen's Association, and the vice-chairman, Chin Tam.

For over 30 years, branch 614 has collaborated with other Scarborough Legions in donating over \$100,000 to support Scarborough Hospital.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to recognize Legion branch 614 president Wayne Hayes and the Legion members for their service to the community. This year also marked Mr. Hayes's 10th anniversary as Legion branch 614 president.

I look forward to this Saturday's celebration.

GRANT HOWES

Mr. Todd Smith: I want to tell the House about the man from Waupoos. In many ways, he's the man who built Waupoos in Prince Edward county. If you go down County Road 8 past the Waupoos pub and marina, you hit the intersection with Bongards Crossroad. It's at this intersection of the world that Grant Howes plied his trade. Unfortunately, we lost Grant over the winter break.

It's at that intersection, though, that the County Cider Company stands as testament to my friend and his hard work, to prove not only that good things grow in Ontario but that you can't beat the things that grow here.

Canadian legend is full of these larger-than-life characters. When Grant died, I said that he reminded me of a character from a Stompin' Tom Connors song. Everything about him was as Canadian as the apples that he grew. From that big hand of his that was always outstretched in a friendly handshake to his pride in the community that he called home, Grant dedicated every waking hour—and I think Jenifer would probably tell you some of his sleeping ones, too—to making sure that he produced only the best cider.

He was so proud of the county, Mr. Speaker, that he put it right there on the label of his ciders. It was on the

tap whenever Grant was pouring from a keg, either here at the Legislature or at trade shows across the province.

Since 1995, only the best came from the farmhouse where the Bongards Crossroad meets County Road 8.

He was a giant, and not just because of his stature. When I wrote in to the Picton Gazette after his passing, I said that an MPP has a thousand teachers. There are people in your community who do their level best to stay in your ear and educate you on any given topic. For me, that was Grant. He produced County Cider, Mr. Speaker, renowned around the world.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements. It's now time for reports by committees.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE
ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated February 21, 2017, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

STOPPING ELECTRICITY
DISCONNECTIONS
IN THE WINTER ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 VISANT À ARRÉTER
LES DÉBRANCHEMENTS EN HIVER
DE L'APPROVISIONNEMENT
EN ÉLECTRICITÉ

Mr. Smith moved first reading of the following bill: Bill 91, An Act to amend the Electricity Act, 1998 and the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998 / Projet de loi 91, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur l'électricité et la Loi de 1998 sur la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1518 to 1523.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Would all members please take their seats. All members, please take your seats.

Mr. Smith has moved that leave be given to introduce a bill entitled An Act to amend the Electricity Act, 1998 and the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998.

All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia
Anderson, Granville	Harris, Michael	Murray, Glen R.
Arnett, Ted	Hatfield, Percy	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Barrett, Toby	Hoggart, Ann	Naqvi, Yasir
Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Natyshak, Taras
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Hunter, Mitzie	Nicholls, Rick
Clark, Steve	Jones, Sylvia	Pettapiece, Randy
Coe, Lorne	Kiwala, Sophie	Potts, Arthur
Coteau, Michael	Lalonde, Marie-France	Sandals, Liz
Damerla, Dipika	Leal, Jeff	Scott, Laurie
Des Rosiers, Nathalie	MacCharles, Tracy	Smith, Todd
Dickson, Joe	MacLaren, Jack	Taylor, Monique
Duguid, Brad	MacLeod, Lisa	Thompson, Lisa M.
Fedeli, Victor	Mantha, Michael	Vanthof, John
Fraser, John	Martow, Gila	Wilson, Jim
French, Jennifer K.	McNaughton, Monte	Wong, Soo
Gates, Wayne	Milczyn, Peter Z.	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Gélinas, France	Miller, Norm	Yakabuski, John
Gretzky, Lisa	Moridi, Reza	Yurek, Jeff

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 57; the nays are 0.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings on a point of order.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Since we're all getting along here this afternoon—we've got the first one down—I seek unanimous consent that the order for second reading for Bill 91, an act to stop electricity disconnections in the wintertime, be called immediately, and, in the event that Bill 91, an act to stop electricity disconnections in the wintertime, receives second reading, that the order for third reading immediately be called and the question put without debate or amendment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings seeks unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? I heard a no.

**SCHOOL BOARDS COLLECTIVE
BARGAINING AMENDMENT ACT, 2017**

**LOI DE 2017 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LA NÉGOCIATION
COLLECTIVE DANS LES CONSEILS
SCOLAIRES**

Ms. Hunter moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 92, An Act to amend the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2014 and make related amendments to other statutes / Projet de loi 92, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2014 sur la négociation collective dans les conseils scolaires et apportant des modifications connexes à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I'm pleased to introduce the School Boards Collective Bargaining Amendment Act, 2017. This bill proposes amendments to the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2014. If passed, the proposed amendments will improve the consistency and transparency of the collective bargaining process, provide more flexibility to all parties, and address technical issues to enhance the already effective two-tiered bargaining framework.

**GASOLINE TAX FAIRNESS
FOR ALL ACT, 2017**

**LOI DE 2017 SUR L'ÉQUITÉ POUR TOUS
À L'ÉGARD DE LA TAXE SUR L'ESSENCE**

Mr. Yakabuski moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 93, An Act to amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act with respect to matching rebates of gasoline tax that the Minister provides to municipalities / Projet de loi 93, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement des voies publiques et des transports en commun à l'égard des remboursements de la taxe sur l'essence similaires consentis aux municipalités par le ministre.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's not the first time I introduced this bill, but with the announcement by the Premier a few weeks ago, I think it's more than appropriate.

The bill amends the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act. If the minister, under section 116 of the act, enters into an agreement with a municipality to provide a rebate of tax under the Gasoline Tax Act to the municipality for the purpose of constructing, maintaining or operating a rapid transit or public transportation system, the minister shall not refuse to enter into an agreement to provide a rebate of tax under that act to any other municipality for a purpose related to public highways under the jurisdiction of the latter municipality. The amount of the rebate that the latter municipality receives shall be based on the number of inhabitants in the municipality and the total distance of public highways under the jurisdiction of the municipality.

1049491 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2017

Mr. Gates moved first reading of the following bill: Bill Pr58, An Act to revive 1049491 Ontario Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

1530

2053266 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2017

Ms. Hoggarth moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr56, An Act to revive 2053266 Ontario Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

PROSPER LEGAL MANAGEMENT INC. ACT, 2017

Mr. Delaney moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr57, An Act to revive Prosper Legal Management Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (SCHOOL BUS CAMERA SYSTEMS), 2017 LOI DE 2017 MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (SYSTÈMES PHOTOGRAPHIQUES RELIÉS AUX AUTOBUS SCOLAIRES)

Mr. Nicholls moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 94, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to evidence obtained from school bus camera systems / Projet de loi 94, Loi modifiant le Code de la route en ce qui concerne la preuve obtenue au moyen des systèmes photographiques reliés aux autobus scolaires.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: As I look in the gallery today, I see a lot of students here. Of course, this particular bill was introduced earlier and is being reintroduced. It's designed to have a video camera mounted on a stop arm on a school bus to catch the number of "blow brys." Pilot projects within the province of Ontario have revealed that

blow brys—cars passing school buses while the lights are flashing and the stop arm is out—are increasing. Hopefully this bill, if passed, will improve this and lessen the danger to our students today.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT

Hon. Michael Coteau: Today, I'll speak as Minister of Children and Youth Services but also as the minister responsible for anti-racism. Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise in the House today to formally recognize the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent.

Before I start, I just want to thank MPP Hunter and also MPP Granville Anderson for the work that they've done to get to this point. It was the three of us and many members of this caucus who worked hard over the last year to get to this point today. And, of course, I would like to thank the Premier.

In recognizing this decade, we're acknowledging that people of African descent represent a distinct group of people whose human rights must be promoted, they must be protected, and whose history, culture and contributions must be respected and celebrated.

I'd like to take a moment to recognize and thank our community partners that are here to join us today. The men and women whom you see in the east members' gallery and other parts of the Legislature here today are folks who have been working hard to advocate on behalf of the community and the rights of racialized people here in Ontario. I just want to say thank you so much for being here. Without your help we couldn't do what we're doing here today.

Mr. Speaker, around the world there are around 1.3 billion people of African heritage. Outside of Africa, it's roughly 200 million people. Over half a million people identify as members of the African community or people of African descent here in Ontario, the province we call home.

The International Decade for People of African Descent calls for the international community to join together with people of African descent to raise awareness, collect statistics, preserve historical memory and celebrate the achievements of black people in the spirit of recognition, justice and development. The objectives of this decade, which started back in 2015 and runs until 2024, are to:

—promote the respect, protection and fulfillment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of people of African descent, as recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

—promote greater knowledge of and respect for the diverse heritage, culture and contributions of people of African descent; and

—adopt and strengthen national, regional and international legal frameworks according to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and ensure their full and effective implementation.

The Canadian government invited a delegation of United Nations human rights experts to assess anti-black racism here in Canada. During their visit last October, the group raised concerns about systemic anti-black racism in the criminal justice system, the education system, the underemployment of black workers and the damaging legacy of Canada's history of slave trade, racial segregation and marginalization. At the same time, the UN delegation welcomed the establishment of Ontario's Anti-Racism Directorate to address this systemic racism and promote fair practices and policies.

We know that racism takes many forms. Sometimes it's subtle, and sometimes it's overt and intentional. Systemic racism harms our entire society, but black and African Canadians are among the most uniquely, and immediately, affected by it. It is true that we have come a long way, but there is so much more that we know we can do as a society to eliminate systemic racism. Together, every single person in this province has a role to play to build a multicultural society that everyone can be proud of.

Our government is committed to fighting systemic racism faced by indigenous and racialized people, including specifically anti-black racism impacting people of African descent. To inform our work, as the minister responsible for this file, I travelled across the province between June and December of last year and listened to people share their stories around racism. We interacted with over 4,000 people across this province, and I have to say that the stories that came out were just incredible. People spoke about the fact that they landed in a new country and they couldn't find employment that was connected to their professional credentials. We heard about people expressing the disproportional number of black families involved in the child welfare system and how their children, once going into that system, lose their identity. We listened to people talk about their educational experiences and the need for change there. There were many thousands of people that shared their stories and talked about how racism impacted their lives.

This government, our people and all of Ontarians are committed to working towards eliminating systemic racism and building a society characterized by racial equity. Recognizing the UN's International Decade for People of African Descent as we celebrate Black History Month this February is part of that commitment.

This province first proclaimed Black History Month back in 1993, marking the 200th anniversary of a law banning the importation of slaves to here in Upper Canada, which we now refer to as Ontario. Last year, Ontario passed legislation to formally recognize February as Black History Month on an annual basis.

Black History Month is an opportunity to reflect on the history that has collectively shaped us. It is important

to share these challenges faced by black Canadians and to celebrate their accomplishments and outstanding contributions to this province and this country.

1540

Mr. Speaker, as the minister responsible for children and youth and the minister responsible for this government's Anti-Racism Directorate, I am committed to engaging with communities in every corner of this province and working with my colleagues across the aisle as we address systemic racism to create opportunities and equitable outcomes for all. Moving forward, we will break down those barriers, and we'll help every Ontarian, regardless of where they are from, to reach their full potential. Thank you very much.

INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY

Hon. Laura Albanese: Today, February 21, is International Mother Language Day. It was on this day in 1952 that university students in Pakistan held a demonstration protesting the Pakistani government's decision to make Urdu the country's national language. At that time, the majority of Pakistani citizens were Bengali, and the students wanted that language recognized as well. Police opened fire, killing several of the protestors. Those students died defending their mother tongue. These protestors died defending a language they believed was under threat. They wanted to preserve their language for themselves and for future generations.

In 1999, the United Nations proclaimed February 21 as International Mother Language Day. Ontario is proud to join with nations around the world in marking this important day thanks to a private member's bill presented in the past by my esteemed colleague the MPP for Richmond Hill in 2009.

Today is a day to reflect on and celebrate peace, diversity and multiculturalism. It is also a day to remind ourselves that some of the most basic freedoms we enjoy are freedoms that others have died to secure and died to defend. The right to communicate in one's mother language is one of these freedoms.

Many of us learn one or both of Canada's two official languages, English and French, growing up. But both Canada and Ontario were built by a great many people whose mother language was not English or French. Today, Ontario is blessed to be home to people from 200 different countries who speak more than 250 different languages and dialects. Here in Ontario, we welcome the mother languages of our newcomers, and they welcome the chance for themselves and their children to learn English and French in school or tuition-free ESL and FSL adult classes. This generous linguistic accommodation is what makes Ontario a beacon to the rest of the world.

This past year, the attention of the world has been fixed on the plight of refugees, particularly Syrian refugees fleeing the terrible civil war unfolding in their country. Ontario, like many other jurisdictions around the

world, has stepped up to help. From November 2015 to the end of 2016, Ontario welcomed more than 20,000 refugees. Approximately 17,000 of these were refugees fleeing the crisis in Syria. We cherish these and the 100,000 immigrants who make our province their home every single year. We cherish everything they bring: their hopes, their dreams, their diversity and their language. Ontario is not a place which asks newcomers to stop speaking one language to learn another; Ontario is a place for all cultures, all races, all beliefs and all languages.

As many of you know, my mother tongue is Italian. A special kind of beauty exists, which is born in language. We bond together over language, and Ontario gives us the opportunity to promote that awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity in multilingualism. On this International Mother Language Day, we proudly say, in 250 different languages and dialects, "You are welcome here." Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further ministerial statements? There being none, it is now time for responses.

INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to speak in honour of International Mother Language Day in Ontario. Also, I would like to thank the honourable minister for making such a good speech.

At this time, I would like to say a few words in my mother tongue, which is Korean.

Remarks in Korean.

As someone who has been living in Ontario for many, many years, but whose mother language is neither English nor French, I recognize the importance of celebrating my cultural heritage through my mother tongue on commemorative days such as this. I feel so fortunate to live in such an accepting and diverse society as Ontario. It is rare to find a place where you can be proud of the culture and language that makes you who you are while also being in such close contact with people of other cultures and other languages.

Ontario's multiculturalism is the envy of the world, expressed vividly through food, art and language. Throughout the province, over 250 languages are spoken daily by people from all over the world. From every corner of the globe, people of different tongues come not only to share their stories and their lives, but also to write new chapters and build new beginnings here in Ontario. By celebrating our diversity on occasions such as International Mother Language Day, we honour and uphold the values that this province stands for.

Language is the backbone of any culture, and by preserving a language, we preserve culture. In preserving a culture, we preserve the individuals and people that make it up.

It is up to us, Mr. Speaker, to continue to support and celebrate our diversity through language so that the voices of the world may be heard in Ontario, a great province.

INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT

Mr. Ted Arnott: On behalf of the Ontario PC caucus, I am honoured to respond to today's statement by the Minister of Children and Youth Services and the minister responsible for anti-racism in recognition of the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent, and in recognition of Black History Month, and in celebration of the outstanding achievements of Ontario's black community.

An understanding of history is vitally important if we are to understand the present and how we came to today. Knowledge of history is in many ways a guide to the future, for it was once said: "The only new thing under the sun is the history you don't know." It's so true.

We all need to take an interest in the extraordinary history of this province and our beloved country. We have been hearing this month the compelling stories of brave war heroes, courageous civil rights pioneers and determined trailblazers. Hearing these stories, we come to better realize that black history is Ontario history. It is the history of Ontario as a beacon of freedom for those escaping the cruelty of slavery in the American South. It is a story of the black Loyalists and the War of 1812 veterans who fought courageously for their freedom with the hope of one day calling Canada home. It is the legacy of a people's perseverance and determination forged in the face of great challenge and adversity.

We hear the stories of former slaves who found freedom here in Ontario, like Josiah Henson and Richard Pierpoint, which remind us of slavery's inhumanity and also that liberty and tolerance are central to the character of the province of Ontario.

We hear the story of civil rights pioneers like Viola Desmond, which remind us of what prejudice and injustice look like, and also inspire the next generation of Canadians to stand up for the courage of their convictions.

We hear the story of Canadians like Lincoln Alexander, whose birthday we acknowledged on January 21. We do this not simply as a reminder of the trials and challenges of bigotry, but also to encourage the next generation of Canadians to strive for excellence, to never give up and to give back in service to the country.

1550

Black History Month is a time to recognize these stories of heroism, bravery and triumph over adversity. Together, all of us can work to ensure that the values we champion—freedom, democracy and human rights—are what unite Ontarians of all backgrounds.

In this, the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent, we say this: Racism in any form is unacceptable. We stand together to condemn

racism in any way it may appear and in any way it manifests itself, for in the 21st century it is our diversity that will continue to be one of our greatest strengths, showing Canada to be a beacon for the world.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further responses?

INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's my honour to rise and speak on behalf of Ontario's New Democrats. As the leader of my party, I've had the privilege to travel all over the province of Ontario. Everywhere I go, I'm reminded of just what an important role the black community has played in shaping this province and, in fact, our country.

As Canada marks its 150th anniversary, Ontario celebrates its 39th Black History Month, and of course I think we're into the third year of the International Decade for People of African Descent. It is a time for us—everywhere, everyone in this province—to take part in the celebration of black and African history and culture in our country and in our province.

When we talk about Black History Month, what we're really talking about is, in fact, Canadian history. From cowboys in Alberta like John Ware to business entrepreneurs like Thornton Blackburn in Toronto, black and African Canadians have been building and shaping this country since the earliest days of its history.

Of course, as a Hamiltonian, I feel a close connection to one such community-builder, a true pioneer for the black community in Ontario and in Canada. Of course, I'm talking about Lincoln Alexander.

Born on Draper Street, just three kilometres from here, Linc had to travel a long road before he eventually found his way to Queen's Park, where he served as Lieutenant Governor. He overcame many challenges, including significant discrimination, to become a highly respected lawyer, politician and community leader, accruing many firsts along the way, including being elected as Canada's first black member of Parliament, representing Hamilton West.

Inspirational leaders like Lincoln Alexander, whose example is still so relevant today, remind us that Black History Month is more than just a curriculum subject for school classrooms; it is a celebration for all Ontarians. Ontario, Canada and communities around the world have been profoundly influenced and enriched by the black community.

Black History Month is a time for all Ontarians and Canadians to celebrate the contributions the black community has made and to honour its role models and leaders past and present. Ontarians of all backgrounds owe it to themselves to take time to learn about the challenges and triumphs of black and African Canadians and Americans, as well as those from the continent and the diaspora. It is important that this history never be forgotten or ignored.

Of course, using the word "history" risks implying that this is all just in the past. It is critical that while

celebrating historic figures and achievements, we never downplay or ignore the challenges still being faced by the black community. Despite some improvements, the black community still bears a disproportionate burden of violence, poverty and lack of opportunity.

There is overrepresentation of young black men in our criminal justice system and overrepresentation of black families in our children's services system. We see what's happening in some of the school boards in this very province, where our minister has had to step up to deal with the racism that continues to occur there.

We have situations where I meet with black families and they tell me that they see their sons being suspended and kicked out of school much more frequently than any other children, and that's not acceptable. That's what we call systemic racism, and unfortunately it exists in many, many of the institutions that we have and that we are responsible for here in this chamber.

You can recall that back in the early 1990s we had an Anti-Racism Secretariat, and I look forward to the minister responsible for anti-racism in his role—I sometimes wonder what it would be like here in the province of Ontario had the subsequent government not gotten rid of the Anti-Racism Secretariat back in the 1990s.

However, thankfully, contemporary black community activists and leaders are carrying on the tradition of human rights pioneers like Stanley Grizzle, Bromley Armstrong and Viola Desmond. These community leaders, past and present, are standing up to make the promise of Canadian multiculturalism, diversity and, in fact, acceptance a reality. Their ongoing struggles and leadership are a call to action to all Ontarians to confront injustice wherever we see it and to build a fair and inclusive society, where everyone can build a future for their family.

Ontario's New Democrats are proud to stand in solidarity with these community activists against anti-black racism and to celebrate the leaders and activists who have come before. The black and African Canadian community, its history and its past struggles should always hold an important place in our schools, in our literature and in our culture. Otherwise, we will not be able to change the present or the future.

Alongside all Ontarians, New Democrats are proud to celebrate Black History Month this year and every year.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their comments.

REMARKS IN OTHER LANGUAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to broach a delicate and a sensitive moment. The standing rules indicate that we're only allowed to use two languages: either English or French. When people say "hello" or make a single comment, Hansard is okay with that and they make that. But when you move into a paragraph in another language, you're actually breaching the rules of the House. I would request some sensitivity to that as we do not know, nor do we expect Hansard to know, what was said in that paragraph.

I would kindly remind all members that the standing rules are such. It will be simply referred to by Hansard as “Spoken in Korean.” I’m using the member as an example, but I want to remind all members: French and English only.

PETITIONS

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the price of electricity has skyrocketed under the Ontario Liberal government;

“Whereas ever-higher hydro bills are a huge concern for everyone in the province, especially seniors and others on fixed incomes, who can’t afford to pay more;

“Whereas Ontario’s businesses say high electricity costs are making them uncompetitive, and have contributed to the loss of hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs;

“Whereas the recent Auditor General’s report found Ontarians overpaid for electricity by \$37 billion over the past eight years and estimates that we will overpay by an additional \$133 billion over the next 18 years if nothing changes;

“Whereas the cancellation of the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants costing \$1.1 billion, feed-in tariff (FIT) contracts with wind and solar companies, the sale of surplus energy to neighbouring jurisdictions at a loss, the debt retirement charge, the global adjustment and smart meters that haven’t met their conservation targets have all put upward pressure on hydro bills;

“Whereas the sale of 60% of Hydro One is opposed by a majority of Ontarians and will likely only lead to even higher hydro bills;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To listen to Ontarians, reverse course on the Liberal government’s current hydro policies and take immediate steps to stabilize hydro bills.”

I agree with this petition and have also affixed my signature to it.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank the residents of the Elizabeth Centre—it’s a long-term-care home in my riding—for collecting these petitions, which they gave to me on Friday. It reads as follows:

“Whereas Ontario’s 627 long-term-care homes play a critical role in the support and care for more than 100,000 elderly Ontarians each and every year;

“Whereas nine out of 10 residents in long-term care today have some form of cognitive impairment, along with other complex medical needs, and require specialized, in-home support to manage their complex needs;

“Whereas each and every year, 20,000 Ontarians remain on the waiting list for long-term care services and yet, despite this, no new beds are being added to the system;

“Whereas over 40% of Ontario’s long-term-care beds require significant renovation or to be rebuilt and the current program put forward to renew them has had limited success;

“Whereas long-term-care homes require stable and predictable funding each year to support the needs of residents entrusted in their care;

“We, the undersigned, citizens of Ontario, call on the government to support the Ontario Long Term Care Association’s Building Better Long-Term Care pre-budget submission and ensure better seniors’ care through a commitment to improve long-term care.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it, and usually I would give it to a page, who is quickly—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Further petitions.

1600

INCLUSIVENESS

Mr. John Fraser: I’m reading a petition I received from Lindsey Barr of World-Changing Kids at the kickoff to Kindness Week in Accora Village. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there has been an increase in fear and hate towards people in our communities who practise different religions and who are from different cultures and races than the majority of the population; and

“Whereas many of our friends are feeling frightened and alone in the face of any form of discrimination and hate; and

“Whereas we want to show the world that the hate seen in Ontario does not reflect the people of our province; and

“Whereas we believe that everyone should feel welcome and safe in our communities. It is the diversity of our province that makes it so wonderful;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“That all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario stand up and speak out against all forms of hate and discrimination and stand together in love and kindness.”

I agree with this petition, and I am affixing my signature to it and giving it to page Elizabeth-Anne.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here that has been signed by literally thousands of constituents.

“Whereas electricity rates have risen by more than 300% since the current Liberal government took office; and

“Whereas over half of Ontarians’ power bills are regulatory and delivery charges and the global adjustment; and

“Whereas the global adjustment is a tangible measure of how much Ontario must overpay for unneeded wind and solar power, and the cost of offloading excess power to our neighbours at a loss; and

“Whereas the energy policies of this Liberal government ignored the advice of independent experts and government agencies, such as the Ontario Energy Board and the Independent Electricity System Operator, and resulted in Ontarians’ electricity costs rising, despite lower natural gas costs and increased energy conservation in the province; and

“Whereas the implementation of cap-and-trade will drive the cost of electricity even higher and deny Ontarians the option to choose affordable natural gas heating; and

“Whereas more and more Ontarians are being forced to cut down on essential expenses such as food and medicines in order to pay their increasingly unaffordable electricity bills;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to take immediate steps to reduce the total cost of electricity paid for by Ontarians, including costs associated with power consumed, the global adjustment, delivery charges, administrative charges, tax and any other charges added to Ontarians’ energy bills.”

Thank you very much for allowing me time to present this petition.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Percy Hatfield: “Petition Supporting a \$15 Minimum Wage.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas a growing number of Ontarians are affected by the growth in low-wage, part-time, casual, temporary and insecure employment; and

“Whereas too many workers are unprotected by current minimum standards outlined in employment and labour laws; and

“Whereas the Ontario government is currently engaging in a public consultation to review and improve employment and labour laws in the province;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Implement a minimum wage of \$15 an hour.”

I fully agree. I’ll give it to page Nicholaus to bring up to the desk.

NANJING MASSACRE

Ms. Soo Wong: I want to thank 2,000 Ontarians who signed this petition, from Kitchener-Waterloo to London, Ajax and Grimsby.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

“Whereas the events in Asian countries during the Second World War are not well-known;

“Whereas Ontarians have not had an opportunity for thorough discussion and examination of the World War II atrocities in Asia;

“Whereas Ontarians are unfamiliar with the World War II atrocities in Asia;

“Whereas Ontario is recognized as an inclusive society;

“Whereas Ontario is home to one of the largest Asian populations in Canada, with over 2.6 million in 2011;

“Whereas some Ontarians have direct relationships with victims and survivors of the Nanjing Massacre, whose stories are untold;

“Whereas the Nanjing Massacre was an atrocity where over 200,000 Chinese civilians and soldiers alike were indiscriminately killed and tens of thousands of women were sexually assaulted in the Japanese capture of the city;

“Whereas December 13, 2017, marks the 80th anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre;

“Whereas designating December 13 each year as a Nanjing Massacre Commemorative Day in Ontario will provide an opportunity for all Ontarians, especially the Asian community, to gather, remember and honour the victims of families affected by the Nanjing Massacre;

“We, the undersigned, residents of Ontario, urge the members of the Ontario Legislative Assembly to pass Bill 79, declaring December 13 as Nanjing Massacre Commemorative Day.”

Mr. Speaker I support this petition. I will give my petition to page Kyra.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Laurie Scott: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas electricity rates have risen by more than 300% since the Liberal government took office; and

“Whereas over half of Ontarians’ power bills are regulatory and delivery charges and the global adjustment; and

“Whereas many rural customers will see delivery charges soaring by as much as 25% in 2017, which will increase their total hydro bills by up to 11.5%; and

“Whereas more and more Ontarians are being forced into energy poverty, having to cut down on essential expenses such as food and medicines in order to pay their increasingly unaffordable electricity bills;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To take immediate steps to reduce the total cost of electricity paid for by Ontarians, including costs associated with power consumed, the global adjustment, delivery charges, administrative charges, tax and any other charges added to Ontarians’ energy bills.”

Signed by many people in my riding from Fenelon Falls, Little Britain and Kirkfield today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Miss Monique Taylor: I'd like to thank Shannon Kyle, who worked so hard putting this petition together and getting the hundreds of names on it. It's named "Add Restoration of Existing Doors and Windows to any Grant Tax Incentive or Funding Projects Initiated to Aid in Energy Conservation."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas it has been widely demonstrated that properly restored or rehabilitated old wooden windows fitted with storms, where needed, are as energy-efficient as new replacement products, and restored windows and doors take up a fraction of the carbon footprint of new products, which do not have the lifespan of older windows, it is the request of the undersigned that any funding made available for replacement of doors and windows also be made available for the restoration of existing doors and windows.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows"—

I will affix my name to this and give it to page Luca.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas payday loans are the most expensive source of credit in Canada and can create the risk of an additional financial burden for the 3% of Ontario households that borrow payday loans; and

"Whereas in Ontario a two-week payday loan carries an annualized interest rate of approximately 547.5%; and

"Whereas these loans are typically marketed to financially vulnerable consumers;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Mandate the Ontario government incrementally reduce the cost of borrowing a payday loan, first to \$18 per \$100 advanced in 2017 and then to \$15 per \$100 advanced in 2018."

I agree with this petition. I sign it and give it to page Connor.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas household electricity bills have skyrocketed by 56% and electricity rates have tripled as a result of the Liberal government's mismanagement of the energy sector;

"Whereas the billion-dollar gas plants cancellation, wasteful and unaccountable spending at Ontario Power Generation and the unaffordable subsidies in the Green Energy Act will result in electricity bills climbing by another 35% by 2017 and 45% by 2020; and

"Whereas the Liberal government wasted \$2 billion on the flawed smart meter program; and

"Whereas the recent announcement to implement the Ontario Electricity Support Program will see average household hydro bills increase an additional \$137 per year starting in 2016; and

"Whereas the soaring cost of electricity is straining family budgets, and hurting the ability of manufacturers and small businesses in the province to compete and create new jobs; and

"Whereas home heating and electricity are a necessity for families in Ontario who cannot afford to continue footing the bill for the government's mismanagement of the energy sector;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately implement policies ensuring Ontario's power consumers, including families, farmers and employers, have affordable and reliable electricity."

I totally agree. I will affix my signature and send it to the table.

1610

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Eileen Thompson from Capreol in my riding for this petition, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas frail elderly patients needing long-term-care placement in homes within the North East Local Health Integration Network (NE LHIN) have been pressured to move out of the hospital to await placement, or stay and pay hospital rates of approximately \$1,000 per day; and

"Whereas frail elderly patients needing long-term-care placement in Sudbury and Sault Ste. Marie have been pressured to move to homes not of their choosing, or to 'interim' beds in facilities that don't meet legislated standards for permanent long-term-care homes; and

"Whereas the practice of making patients remain in 'interim' beds is contrary to Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) policy which identifies 'interim' beds as intended to 'ensure a continuous flow-through so that interim beds are constantly freed up for new applicants from hospitals';

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"Ensure health system officials are using 'interim' beds as 'flow-through,' in accordance with fairness and as outlined in MOHLTC policy;

"Ensure patients aren't pressured with hospital rates and fulfill promises made to hundreds of nursing home residents who agreed to move temporarily with the promise that they would be relocated as soon as a bed in a home of their choosing became available."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask my nice page Quinn to bring it to the Clerk.

ICE MACHINES

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas ice machines are found everywhere throughout the health care system, including long-term-care facilities and hospitals; and

“Whereas numerous bacteria and viruses are known to contaminate ice cubes, including cholera, typhoid fever, salmonella, legionella, E. coli, shigella, hepatitis A and norovirus I and II; and

“Whereas the lack of regulation increases the probability of consuming ice from ice machines with unhygienic levels of bacteria and/or viruses, putting public safety at risk; and

“Whereas individuals consuming ice from a contaminated ice machine in a hospital or long-term-care facility are at a greater risk due to potentially weakened immune systems; and

“Whereas the inherent risk and rate at which both bacteria and biofilm grow inside ice machines have caused other countries to mandate the cleaning of ice machines; and

“Whereas there are currently no mandates or guidelines on the frequency or thoroughness of cleaning for institutional ice machines in hospitals, long-term-care or other health care facilities;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the province of Ontario establish and enforce cleaning and hygiene standards for all institutional ice machines in provincially funded and/or operated facilities.”

I agree with this. I will sign my name and send it down with page Nolan.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The time for petitions has now expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'AIDE MÉDICALE À MOURIR

Mr. Murray, on behalf of Mr. Hoskins, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 84, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to medical assistance in dying / Projet de loi 84, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'aide médicale à mourir.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the minister. Actually, I recognize not the minister but, this go-round, the member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's good to be back. Good to see you in the chair.

I'm pleased to rise and discuss Bill 84, the Medical Assistance in Dying Statute Law Amendment Act. If passed, this legislation would support the implementation

of medical assistance in dying in Ontario, which is also referred to as, and as I will in the speech, MAID.

The bill will provide more protection and greater clarity for the implementation of MAID for patients, their families and their health care providers. As I will outline, the bill as proposed aligns with the federal legislation regarding medical assistance in dying, which was enacted following a Supreme Court of Canada decision in the case that challenged the prohibition of assisted dying.

Speaker, I'd like to begin by providing you with the context under which we got to this point. The Supreme Court of Canada issued its decision in *Carter v. Canada* on February 6, 2015. In the *Carter* decision, the court unanimously struck down the Criminal Code prohibition against physician-assisted dying for “a competent adult person who ... clearly consents to the termination of” his or her “life ... has a grievous and irremediable medical condition,” and is “enduring suffering that is intolerable to the individual in the circumstances of his or her condition.”

The Supreme Court suspended its decision in *Carter* for 16 months to allow federal, provincial and territorial governments and regulatory bodies, should they choose, to develop an appropriate response, including potentially enacting legislation consistent with the decision. During this time, our government led a process with the provinces and territories to engage and consult with key stakeholders and Canadians on this complex and personal issue, and make recommendations.

Following the 16-month suspension of the court's declaration in *Carter*, the federal government passed Bill C-14, which came into force on June 17, 2016. It's just a little over eight months old. I'd like to point that out and will say a bit more about that later in my remarks. The federal legislation provides a national framework to support the implementation of MAID. The legislation outlines the eligibility criteria required to obtain MAID, requires procedural safeguards to be followed, requires that a monitoring regime be established, and promotes a safe and consistent approach to medically assisted dying across the country.

Under the federal legislation, to obtain medically assisted dying, an individual must first be eligible to receive health services funded by a government in Canada, be at least 18 years of age and capable of making health care decisions, have a grievous and irremediable medical condition, voluntarily request medical assistance in dying and give informed consent to receive MAID. Safeguards in the legislation include a requirement that two independent physicians or nurse practitioners determine a patient's eligibility, a mandatory reflection period and a requirement that a request for MAID be produced in writing in the presence of two independent witnesses.

Speaker, I've just briefly outlined the Supreme Court decision and the accompanying federal legislation. Before I describe the details of the proposed bill before us today and its role in light of these developments, let me provide an overview of the steps we have already taken to support the implementation of medically assisted

dying in Ontario. These steps reflect our commitment to providing Ontarians with the best possible information and assistance they need when making decisions about their care. That is why the ministry implemented a number of initiatives in the months immediately following passage of Bill C-14. These initiatives include information, tools and training to help patients, health care providers and health care facilities understand how to access or offer medical assistance in dying.

We've been working closely with the province's health regulatory colleges that regulate physicians, nurses and pharmacists to provide guidance on MAID and their respective members. We have moved forward with funding the cost of drugs for MAID so that they are available to Ontarians at no cost. A clinician referral service has been launched that helps clinicians locate other clinicians willing to provide or assist in the provision of MAID. This service is used in cases where doctors and nurse practitioners may object to providing MAID on moral or religious grounds, and are looking to refer patients to willing providers. This service is also used for locating a clinician to provide a second assessment, which is required under the federal legislation.

Finally, we have taken steps to ensure information sharing and monitoring of any implementation issues through regular webinars with system leaders, stakeholders, including health professional associations, sector associations, LHINs and patient groups.

Mr. Jim Wilson: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Point of order: I recognize the member from Simcoe—Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm sorry to interrupt the speaker, but I'm just wondering if we have quorum.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

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The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): A quorum is present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): A quorum is present. I return to the member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: With these initiatives in place, we are now proposing further steps through this legislation that, if passed, support the implementation of medical assistance in dying in a manner that aligns with the federal legislation. This proposed legislation, which introduces amendments to a number of provincial acts, is necessary to further support and protect providers and patients.

Although the federal legislation—and this is important, Mr. Speaker—is comprehensive and contains important safeguards, there are some issues that it does not address since they fall under provincial jurisdiction. That is why I'm pleased to speak today about Bill 84, the Medical Assistance in Dying Statute Law Amendment Act.

It provides clarity and direction for clinicians and patients navigating MAID and ensures there is appropriate oversight for MAID deaths in this province. The bill

contains a narrow series of amendments to existing legislation, including amendments to the Excellent Care for All Act, which, if passed, would include the following two provisions. First, medical assistance in dying would not affect a right or benefit that would otherwise exist under a contract or statute, whether it be life insurance or survivor benefits. That's a very key part of this legislation and I'm glad it's there. Second, physicians, nurse practitioners and persons assisting in the lawful provision of MAID would have immunity from civil liability.

Amendments to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act would ensure that claims under the act would be determined based on the illness or disease for which the worker was determined to be eligible to receive medical assistance in dying.

An amendment to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act would, if passed, protect clinicians and facilities willing to provide MAID from being identified under access-to-information laws and requests.

Further, an amendment to the Coroners Act would, if passed, ensure the effective monitoring of medical assistance in dying by:

(1) requiring the coroner to be notified of all MAID deaths—certain information would be required to be disclosed by clinicians so that the coroner is able to properly exercise discretion in determining whether to investigate;

(2) clarifying that the existing requirement under the Coroners Act to investigate any death from any cause other than disease does not apply to medical assistance in dying;

(3) clarifying when the coroner is required to complete death certificates for MAID deaths;

(4) requiring a review of the coroner's oversight role.

The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services would establish this review process within two years of passage of this bill.

Finally, an amendment to the Vital Statistics Act would clarify requirements respecting the coroner's documentation of medical-assistance-in-dying deaths, consistent with the proposed Coroners Act amendments.

Speaker, you will see from the proposed legislation that we have outlined steps necessary to safeguard the rights of patients and health care professionals. It is important to point out that the steps we have already taken to facilitate MAID and the proposed amendments—changes that respond to the Supreme Court ruling and that we must therefore put in place—were built through the hard work of our government, in consultation with our stakeholders.

This process involved thousands of Ontarians and health care providers who shared their views. For example, we conducted surveys, invited submissions through a dedicated email account, and held in-person and online consultation. This process reflected our

commitment to undertaking changes to our health care system in a manner that best meets patient needs.

Further, the government has heard concerns expressed by clinicians who have conscientious or religious objection to providing medical assistance in dying. I want to make it clear that the bill, if passed, does not require a clinician to perform MAID or assess a patient for MAID. Thus, in addition to the clinical referral service already in place, the government is working to establish a care coordination service which would assist patients and caregivers in accessing additional information and services for medical assistance in dying and other end-of-life options. We would be working closely with our health care delivery partners to ensure that the service meets the needs of patients and clinicians.

Just as important, Mr. Speaker, we are committed to doing this while supporting alternative end-of-life options. Ontarians deserve to have a health care system that provides seamless, consistent and compassionate care that includes information and access to the fullest range of choices possible. I want to point out that the care coordination service would also provide patients and their families with information on palliative care so they can make the choice that is right for them.

As I've carefully outlined here today, Ontario is taking a thorough and thoughtful approach to medical assistance in dying, in light of the Supreme Court's ruling and subsequent federal legislation. What our government is proposing to do with Bill 84 is to introduce amendments that are necessary in light of the fact that medical assistance in dying is both legal and practised. Between June and December 2016, a total of 187 medically assisted deaths occurred in Ontario. We have made every effort to propose the best possible legislation in light of these developments. The bill, if passed, would provide additional clarity and protections to patients and clinicians.

The goal here is to support patient choice while protecting the vulnerable and respecting the rights of health care providers and institutions. The proposed amendments would do just that. If the bill is passed, we would continue to monitor stakeholder and public opinion. As part of this process, we would continue to rely on our partners in health care for input and additional feedback.

We would also continue to monitor for operational changes. For example, we identified issues that include timely access to MAID drugs and assessments, as well as sufficient clinical capacity to service medical-assistance-in-dying requests. The Ontario government continues to engage with the federal government on these and other important issues regarding MAID.

Our government remains as committed as ever to the goal of putting patients at the centre of all we do in health care. The proposed medical-assistance-in-dying statute law is needed to deliver on this commitment. Our job at the provincial level is to ensure that we are providing the information, the tools and the training to help patients, health care providers and health care facilities understand medical assistance in dying. We are providing more

protection and greater clarity for patients and their families and health care providers, and we have taken steps to ensure that the bill before us today aligns with the federal legislation and addresses areas that fall under provincial jurisdiction.

We know that medical assistance in dying is an important issue for people. Because of the Supreme Court decision, it is now legal in Canada, so we need to look at how we provide these services to people when they need them. Death and dying is a difficult topic. We don't really ever want to talk about it very much. It's important to recognize that there are differences of opinion on medical assistance in dying—for some people, at a very, very fundamental level.

Part of my mandate as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is to oversee our government's efforts in the area of palliative and end-of-life care, so for many months now I've been talking to stakeholders. I think we had about 350 at our consultations last year and continuing through this year with health care stakeholders, caregivers and families, talking about death and dying and how we care for each other at the end of our lives and how we need to provide comfort and compassion to people at the end of their lives.

Just to back up a little bit, if I can, Mr. Speaker, I was very fortunate to be made the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health at the same time, in August 2014, that the Carter decision was being discussed. It was actually, I think, just before the decision. When I became parliamentary assistant, the minister said, "What would you like to do?" I said, "I'd like to work on palliative and end-of-life-care issues because I think they're critical." I was fortunate enough to be given that as part of my mandate in that letter, a very important part. So I'm really very thankful for that.

1630

Not often do you get an opportunity in your job to work on something that you really care about and that is important to you and that you have some understanding of. I've been doing work as a volunteer and through government for about 20 years, always maintaining a connection to that. So I feel very fortunate, and equally as fortunate last summer to have continued on in the PA shuffle—not having been shuffled—to be able to continue to work on this. I want to assure all members of the House that I am continuing to work on it.

Because of these responsibilities, I spent a great deal of time reflecting on death, dying and end-of-life care and the need for us to act in compassion, mercy and love. I had to ask myself the question—I'm not a health care provider, but I had to think about the question because I had spoken to a number of providers on different sides of the issue about how they felt about it. Some had strong objections; some had concerns—on both sides. I still haven't come to the answer myself, but I do know we have to act out of compassion and love and mercy.

I went to the person who I trust most: I spoke to my mom. My mother, Mary, is a registered nurse. She's 84—sorry, mom; I guess I wasn't supposed to say that out

loud. She's somebody who I know I can trust for her insight and wisdom. She's an incredibly practical person and very devoted and committed. I asked my mom, "Mom, you're a nurse. I know you're not practising anymore, but do you think you could participate?" She spent 35 years as a registered nurse at the National Defence Medical Centre in Ottawa, which is no longer operating as a hospital. Her response to me—and this is really telling. My mom is a person of really deep faith, and her answer was, "I don't think I could, because I believe God gives and takes life away," and in the next breath she said, "but there are extreme circumstances." So what she said to me as I understood it was, "You just asked me a question—it's a hypothetical question—to which here is my answer. But it's a question which I have no proximity to. It's not in front of me. I don't see it."

So it's important for all of us to realize that—not just as individuals, because we're not all going to be put in that situation. I think we have to take that approach. This is what we're doing in this bill. We have to come through this together. As we gain proximity to the thing, as we have in identifying things like the need to protect people's insurance rights, the need to protect their WSIB rights, the need to protect them from litigation—as we get that proximity and we get closer, this will evolve and develop so we have an understanding, a common community understanding of how to move forward.

Medical assistance in dying is a difficult and very personal choice. As I said, it's important for us to move forward as a society with respect for everyone's choices, opinions and decisions. It's more than just an academic discussion; it's about the way we feel. It's about the way we view the world. It's about compassion and mercy and love. Ultimately, we need to consider, when we look at the Supreme Court's ruling on medical assistance in dying and the federal government's amendments to the Criminal Code, that at its core, the decision is about choice. To have real choice you need to have choices. That's why, on this side and, I know, across this Legislature, we're advocating for better palliative care: because those other choices are access to quality end-of-life and palliative care. I know that the minister is committed to that. I know I'm committed. I know all members of the House are committed to that.

Last year, when we announced some of the initiatives we had for community-based palliative care and the Ontario Palliative Care Network, members on all sides of this House, during that budget speech, applauded that one part. I will never forget that, because you don't see that happen very much in a budget speech. So I'm very proud of all the members in this Legislature. When I have an opportunity to visit their ridings, and I have, to make some hospice announcements or be there to meet with—when I was in Windsor, I met with Darren Cargill, who I have a lot of respect for. He's doing some really great work.

I guess I'd better not be listing people off, although I do have an hour.

Mr. Grant Crack: Keep going.

Mr. John Fraser: I'm going, thanks.

It's just incredible to me how engaged members are in their communities on this issue, whether it's with visiting a home hospice or bereavement. I think almost all of the members in this House have either raised that issue or are passionate about that, so I just want to say thank you to all of the members for their support for those initiatives.

Our government is working hard to make sure that patients have access to quality palliative care. We've committed to supporting high-quality palliative care and end-of-life care for all Ontarians who need it. We understand that making end-of-life decisions is a both challenging and sensitive topic for patients, their families and health care providers, and we want to support them by promoting dignified palliative and end-of-life care—care that relieves suffering and improves the quality of living. That's what it's all about: It's about living. The things that are most important at the end of life are really the things that are important during life. It's just that they become more important and we focus on them. Those are the things that it's important, as a community, we start to recognize.

I beg your indulgence, Speaker.

This change is a community change—and I'll talk a bit more about this later. It's about a culture change. It's about how we approach end-of-life and suffering, and how we take responsibility for each other, not just as governments, but as communities and communities of practice, families, friends, volunteers. It's a big change, and it's going to require everybody rowing in the same direction.

When you go to communities like Windsor, Sudbury, Ottawa or Kingston, you find that those programs that are most effective in relieving pain and suffering are those programs that more parties are involved with. That level of collaboration and that working together is a thing that's making a difference in those communities, and as a government we have to do what we can to support and build on that. As members in this Legislature, we have to do what we can—not just from a resource perspective from government, but with our time and attention—to talk to people inside our community about the importance of coming together and working together to provide the kind of comfort that people need.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Take your time.

Mr. John Fraser: I've got lots. I might take a second drink of water. Are you all paying attention now? There you go.

We're taking action to help more people get better palliative and end-of-life care that respects their wishes and is provided where they want it, which usually means at home.

It is important for Ontarians to plan now for the end of life by talking with family, friends and health care providers about their wishes. This is a critical part of that culture change. We don't often talk about it at home.

I'll relate to you two experiences. I think my wife, Linda, is listening, so it's good I'm not back home for

three days. I just want to say that we talk about it at home, and it's easy for me to talk about it. I say, "Well, if this happens, this is what I would like. These are what my wishes are. Here's how I'd like it handled." To be fair, Linda doesn't want to hear that, and I don't think that's an uncommon experience. She doesn't want to have that conversation, because we don't want to think about our own mortality, and we don't want to think about how that's going to affect other people. We don't want to think about what we think is the unthinkable, but the reality is it's thinkable, because we're all going there.

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But it's a difficult conversation to have. It's an important conversation to have. It takes an effort to do that. You don't have to do it all at once. There are all sorts of tools out there for advance care planning that help people to define what it is and what's important—because it's really about what's important to you, right? It's really about what's important to you in your life.

A clinician said to me once, "You know, the thing I ask when I'm talking to a patient who is palliative is, 'What are you afraid of? What are your fears? What's important to you? And what would you do to get that thing that's important to you?'"", which is a pretty basic human conversation. It's important because it informs your health care provider, to make sure that you can get access to those things that are important to you, that you can have some confidence that you'll be able to experience those things.

So often, people end up in an emergency room when that's not really where they wanted to end up, because they were not going to be able to deal with those things or have access to those things that are important to them. Or they end up with interventions that, if they fully understood the impact of that on their lives and what was important to them, they would not have otherwise taken. It is important for us, and it's important, as a gift to someone you love, to someone who's going to make that substitute decision for you, to have some idea about what's important to you, because it's very difficult for people, when they have to make a substitute decision.

I'm going to tell a story about my mom. I'm sorry, Mom. My mom and I—I know this will be okay with her—have had numerous conversations. My mom is 84—I did it again. About a year and a half ago, she had a heart attack, and she had two stents put in her heart. My mom is very practical, and she started talking about, "Well, you know, here are the things that I want." She started thinking more about dying, so we'd have conversations back and forth. She said to me, "I don't want any extreme measures. Here is how, when I pass, I'd like you to do these things."

So this Christmas, just before Christmas, I walked into the house, and there on the table was, in my mom's script, which is typical nursing-type script, a list of instructions—quite legible, because nurses' instructions are very legible; that's a thing I've learned, growing up with a nurse. She went through all these things. It was hard to read, but I was happy that I saw it. It was harder for some of my siblings. We had conversations.

One day, I'm walking down Bay Street and I call Mom, because I try to call my mom as often as I can when I'm here—not as often as I should. I say, "Mom, we're talking," and we start talking about it again. We're on the phone and we're talking about her wishes at the end of life, on the phone, walking down the street in the cold of winter. And she repeats it: She says to me, "I don't want any extreme measures."

I said, "Okay, Mom." This is the importance of the conversation, and it's really important to underline that it's an ongoing conversation. She said, "I don't want any extreme measures." "Okay, you don't want any extreme measures. Okay. Mom, you have a heart attack in the house right now. Do you want CPR?" Pause. It's really important to have these conversations, because that was not included in what she felt was an extreme. So they're really important conversations to have. I wanted to share that personal story. I know my Mom's okay with it—or I'm 90% sure she's okay with it.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: You'll find out.

Mr. John Fraser: I know she is.

It's important. I know we're discussing this very important bill that's addressing some very specific and narrow definitions, narrow things that need to be corrected in certain acts here. But I think it's an important opportunity for us to talk about things like this, and the impact of advance care planning on our personal lives and on informing the health care system so it can do what is important to the patient. That's critical.

Many of us have had the talk with loved ones about who would make critical decisions that need to be made in the event that we are unable to because we had become ill or had been in an accident. We all know we need to do this while capable of doing it so that we can ensure the right decisions get made in keeping with our wishes, yet we hesitate. As my former boss said, we often confuse the immediate with the important. These discussions about advance care planning are critical. I'll leave you with that thought. Maybe you'll answer it at the end.

Advance care planning is about making clear how you wish to be cared for and about giving someone you trust the authority to act on those wishes for you if the need arises.

The government recognizes that we also have an important role to play when it comes to palliative and end-of-life care. Our approach is to ensure that the services we deliver will improve the quality of life and, Mr. Speaker, the quality of death. We are improving the health care experience so that patients and caregivers understand their palliative care options and how the system works. This will help alleviate their stress and help them focus on what's important.

We're building a palliative care system that is co-ordinated, equitable, accountable and sustainable. Starting last year we increased our investments in hospice and palliative care. I mentioned that earlier—\$155 million over three years for very important services. I know that of the 34 hospices in Ontario, we increased their operating funds and we're going to support up to 20 new hospices in Ontario.

There are supports for caregivers and supports for visiting home hospice. The Ontario Palliative Care Network, through Cancer Care Ontario, is there to ensure that we can measure, that we can have quality and that we can ensure access. It's not a widely known piece but it's a really critical piece in ensuring that we continue to move forward on this, that we ensure that there's a coordinated effort.

The growth of hospice and palliative care was based on coalitions. The eventual grand coalition was seen in the Declaration of Partnership and Commitment to Action. I think there are over 80 agencies and regulatory bodies and associations that have signed on to this to say, "Here are the things that we need to do."

The Ontario Palliative Care Network, in collaboration with them—that declaration of partnership continues to grow. It was important for that to be solidified and given a space inside government, inside the health care system, in order to make sure that we continue to move forward in a way that is going to ensure access to quality palliative end-of-life care.

We're also providing services and resources for caregivers and volunteers because we recognize the important role they play in palliative care and we want to ensure that they remain healthy too, because we understand that the toll for caring for someone near the end of life can really have a great impact on a person.

Many of you know my own experience with my father, who was diagnosed with an inoperable oral cancer just after my first election—it was about three months after my election. It was kind of tough news. His journey we went through together as a family, and it was a journey that informed the work that I do right now. It had some really great moments—excellent care—and then it had moments where things fell between the cracks. There were problems in transitions from one setting to another. There was not great communication. But at the end of the day, if I go the way that my father went, in that way, I'll think I've won the lottery, because it was a fairly big effort where we all came together, and there was a lot more good than there were things that were negative. But there were things that I knew needed to be fixed.

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What remained with me is that I think it's incumbent on all of us that we ensure that families have that choice, have that option, that we are able to provide care for people whose families may not be able to make that kind of commitment. It's not just family; it's as communities that we have to look after each other.

We were very fortunate: A year to the day after my father's death was our first grandchild, and we've had two more since then. My theory is, one in, one out. That experience was something else that informed me, because with the babies coming into the world I realized that all of us, as families, as health care providers, as educators, if you're coming into this world, the nursery is set up, we've got schools going, we've got whatever we need in hospitals, we've got great midwifery practices—as a community, we're all ready, we're all there. We're

all thinking about that. At the end of life, it's not so much; it's not really the same way. What really occurred to me is that the end of life deserves the same kind of attention that we give to the beginning of life, and I think that should inform all of us. They're not really different. They're just opposite ends of the same string. There are a lot of similarities in the experience. That's part of what informs me, as we go forward on working on palliative care.

I want to thank all those who took the time to participate in that consultation I mentioned earlier. They helped us by sharing their insight and experiences, and it has really helped us to shape and inform the report that I wrote and the future direction of palliative care in Ontario. There's a lot of work to do; there's no question about that. The things that I heard and saw in the consultation with all of those people—the health care providers, the families, the caregivers—really did resonate with me. It resonated with me because it was reflective of my own personal experience.

Mr. Speaker, it's important that we have those important discussions about what we want in the event that we cannot speak for ourselves later. Medical assistance in dying, as I said, has provided the context to have that conversation. Again, the imperative is, since the Supreme Court decision and subsequent legislation is really about choice, that we have to make sure the choices are there and we have to talk about those choices. It's given us an opportunity to talk about something that's really a very critical part of our lives, which we don't talk about enough and which we don't share with loved ones.

Medical assistance in dying is only one part of the larger conversation on how we provide care for people at the end of their lives, and we're working hard to provide that care. It's going to take a lot of work, but I know that we're all, in this Legislature, committed to doing it. We know that we want to give people choices about end-of-life care, and we know that 70% to 80% of Canadians would prefer to die at home if the right supports were available. We have to work to make sure those supports are available, not just from a perspective of government and the health services we fund, but also from the perspective of the communities that we live in and how we come together over those things that are important in our lives: our service organizations, our churches, our municipal governments.

One of those things that we have to focus on is—look, it's something we do through our municipal governments for kids coming into the world, and we do that provincially. We need to put a focus on that. We need people to understand what it means to support someone at the end of their life. It can be a really big family effort and it takes more than just family sometimes; it takes community. We have to think about our neighbours and we have to think about what resources we have in our community that we can bring to bear to help provide comfort and compassion and love and mercy to people.

Although we know that about 80% of Ontarians want to die at home, we know that's far less than what actually

happens; most people die in hospital. About 6% of people die in hospice, and we're trying to increase that. Hopefully we'll be able to double that number.

We're doing some work right now on consulting with people in long-term care about some of the great things that are happening in long-term care and how we actually expand that and make that grow. I think that's critical because long-term-care homes are home. As I've seen by going around, there are some really incredible things that are happening in many places in this province, but we need to have more of that.

There is some work to do. We have to ensure that the high-quality supports Ontarians expect and want are available to them at the end of life's journey. We're going to ensure that people have options so they can make the choices that are right for them.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to recap here, if you'll give me a moment, the provisions included in this bill—the very specific provisions. You'll just have to give me a second here.

Mr. Han Dong: It's very important stuff.

Mr. John Fraser: It is.

Again, we're providing clarity and direction for clinicians and patients navigating MAID and ensuring there is proper oversight for medically assisted deaths in this province. The bill contains a narrow series of amendments to existing legislation, including amendments to the Excellent Care for All Act, which, if passed, would include the following two provisions: first, that MAID would not affect a right or a benefit that would otherwise exist under a contract or a statute, whether it be life insurance or survivor benefits; second, the physicians, nurse practitioners and persons assisting in the lawful provision of MAID would have immunity from civil liability.

Again, amendments to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act would ensure that claims under the act would be determined based on the illness or disease for which the worker was determined to be eligible to receive medical assistance in dying.

There is also an amendment to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act that would, if passed, protect clinicians and facilities willing to provide MAID from being identified under access-to-information laws and requests.

I did mention as well a number of provisions under the Coroners Act. Again, just to restate those: requiring the coroner to be notified of all MAID deaths, and also certain information would be required to be disclosed by clinicians so that the coroner is able to properly exercise discretion in determining whether to investigate; clarifying that the existing requirement under the Coroners Act to investigate any death from any cause other than the disease does not apply to MAID; also clarifying when the coroner is required to complete death certificates for MAID deaths; and requiring a review of the coroner's oversight role. The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services would establish this review process within two years of passage of this bill.

Finally, there's an amendment to the Vital Statistics Act that would clarify the requirements respecting the coroner's documentation of medical-assistance-in-dying deaths consistent with the proposed Coroners Act amendments.

Again, you'll see that in this proposed legislation we've outlined the steps necessary to safeguard the rights of patients and health care professionals. It is important that we take these steps to facilitate MAID. As you can see, they are a very narrow swath of what's in our provincial jurisdiction, and what we need to do to make sure that patients and providers are protected.

1700

I want to congratulate the minister and the Attorney General, who worked on this act. I know there's been a lot of work. As I said, we've done a fair amount of consultation in advance of this. As I said earlier, individually most of us have no proximity to this, and we need to have proximity so that we come through it together. It's a really critical thing about how we display compassion, mercy and love as a society.

I'm encouraged by what's in this bill. I'm encouraged by the work and the support of all members of this Legislature to improve palliative and end-of-life care. I'd like to thank everybody very much for their time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to provide a comment, and I'd like to ask the member for Ottawa South a question. First of all, my comment is that I want to thank him for his advocacy on palliative care. He mentioned that he had attended a number of ridings, and Leeds-Grenville was one of the ridings that he visited. Ottawa South is very close to a municipality in my riding, the municipality of North Grenville, which borders the city of Ottawa. Mr. Fraser was very—sorry; the member for Ottawa South was very accommodating. He came and toured the Beth Donovan Hospice, both their office and their new "forever home." I know that I've advocated to him many times that it's high time that the Champlain LHIN looked outside of the city of Ottawa for the next hospice funding. So I appreciate his advocacy.

In terms of the question, I know that Minister Hoskins has received a number of letters regarding C-14 and the fact that the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario has adopted a protocol that requires an effective referral for medical aid in dying. This issue has come up in constituency offices. I spent a lot of time in my constituency office last week, and I saw a number of letters from my constituents asking me about an amendment to Bill 84 that would protect the conscience rights of physicians and other health care workers.

So I'd like to, through you, ask the member for Ottawa South if the government is going to support an amendment. As I said, my inboxes have been filling up over the last week with constituents asking me to ask this question of the government, and I would appreciate if, in his final response, he would give me some indication of whether the government would support that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: My friend from Ottawa South talked about Mother Mary, compassion, love and mercy. I take you back, Speaker, to May 1996, 21 years ago, and Dr. Death—Dr. Kevorkian of Detroit. In Windsor, a 53-year-old tool-and-die maker, Austin Bastable, wanted to die. He had MS. He could only move his head and his left hand. He tried to get Canadian doctors to help him out. Of course, at that time in Canada you were facing 14 years in prison if you did something like that. He tried suicide. It didn't work; his wife found him and called 911. Anyway, a couple of years later, he went over to Detroit. Dr. Kevorkian was there, was in the home of the local president of the Hemlock Society. There were five other medical doctors from Michigan there. Austin Bastable was given a face mask and a cylinder of carbon monoxide. At 53 years of age in Detroit, instead of in Canada, he passed away.

At that time in Canada, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien didn't want anything to do with it, even though 75% of Canadians polled at that time agreed with medical assistance in dying. It has taken from then, in the Canadian experience, until now to get to this point and to have this discussion today.

I remember well, as a reporter in Windsor at that time with the local CBC, all of the stories we did on Austin Bastable and Dr. Kevorkian and this debate and everybody wondering how long in Canada before we would see where we are today, what was taking place in Michigan in those days.

I want to give applause to the member from Ottawa South for his contribution this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. David Zimmer: Speaker, if you will permit me a slight deviation from the debate, I wanted to say this this morning: I was saddened and alarmed to hear of the shocking anti-Semitic acts that took place in my riding of Willowdale this past weekend, when notes of hatred were left outside Jewish homes and their doors vandalized.

Anti-Semitism and other acts of hate have no place in our society and do not represent the diverse and caring community of Willowdale. Our government takes incidents of hate crimes and discrimination seriously, and we vigorously uphold the laws which will protect our society from them. We work together as a society to create opportunities and remove barriers. We aim to make Ontario a place where everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed and everyone can live feeling safe and free from discrimination.

I want to recognize Willowdale's 32 division of the Toronto Police Service for their swift action to investigate this ugly incident. For anyone listening to this who has any information about this awful thing, I urge you to contact 32 division.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to medical assistance in dying: Along with some of my caucus colleagues—and as the

member from Leeds—Grenville just pointed out—I met with the College of Physicians and Surgeons representatives and some of their executive before Christmas on this bill. They were setting up a process for conscientious objectors—that there had to be somebody on the premises. If the doctor or the nurse wasn't going to tell you what the process was or a phone number to contact, for the family or the patient, there had to be somebody available to the patient for the referral or for the information referral. But it's unclear. And I shouldn't have to, as a parliamentarian, learn this stuff from the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

I think you guys—and it's the same thing as the member for Leeds—Grenville was saying. The Minister of Health needs to explain this legislation further to us so that we know that conscientious objectors are dealt with. As a Catholic—conscientious objectors are dealt with in our Catholic hospitals. I'd like to hear there's something similar on the table before I vote on this legislation. I tend to want to vote on the legislation, but we feel very strongly about this. We mentioned it before Christmas. It's back again now the first day after the break. Before we vote, I just ask that that whole matter of how it's going to be dealt with be cleared up. There are a number of us in the House who are very, very concerned about that.

I do want to thank the member for Ottawa South. He helped a hospice in Alliston get its funding. He came up in the summer, and he was a real gentleman about the announcement—and also the member for Barrie, who is the moneybags who comes into my riding from time to time. Ann, any time you're available to bring another bag of money, you're welcome.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Ottawa South for final comments.

Mr. John Fraser: I want to thank the member from Leeds—Grenville, the member from Windsor—Tecumseh and the member from Simcoe—Grey. I have been to all of your communities, so it was nice to hear you speak on this. I know about your commitment to palliative care.

What I do want to say about this bill is that it very specifically addresses some things that the federal legislation does not address. Federally, if you look at the protections that exist inside the federal law, they're very clear that providers will not be forced to participate in medical assistance in dying.

As far as amendments go in this process, please put amendments forward. That's what we do in this process, and I know that you will.

It is important to remember—and again, this is the proximity thing that I talked about—that this is something we have to come through together. So it is a balance, and it is a difficult balance because which right has supremacy? So we have to find a way through.

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I know that the minister—and I'm sure he will want to talk to this. We did the clinician referral service and the care coordination service, which is something that was specifically put out there for patients and families and for

those providers. So there's a lot of work being done on that.

We are very conscious of the concerns that you're raising. I'm very conscious of it. I think we have to find a way to balance all those rights. It's critical to act with compassion and love and mercy. As I said, the government's always open to amendments. Again, if you take a look at that, remember that it's a balance of those two rights. If you're going to insert something, you may end up having a challenge between those two rights that I think are important and critical to be balanced, and that's why we have to come through this together.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? The member from Elgin–Middlesex–London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you, Speaker. Welcome back from being home for the last few months. I welcome everyone back to the Legislature. It's great to be back here in Toronto debating the legislative orders of the day. I hope everyone had an opportunity to enjoy their Family Day weekend.

Just before I get into my talk, I have to note that St. Thomas was the home of the World Tubing Championships this weekend. With the 10-degree-plus weather, we were still able to clock people coming down the hill with the snow that was created the week prior. All the money raised that day went to our hospital, St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital. They raised over \$60,000. I think it was great. I want to thank Paul Jenkins, who is the executive director of the St. Thomas foundation, for coordinating this event.

I do have to say, I put in a team with my fellow MP, Karen Vecchio, for the day. However, feeling that we think we're getting a little bit old for tubing, we put our kids in the event. So my daughter, Maggie, and her friend Hannah, and Karen's son, Christian, and his friend Clark provided the action for the team. They did well. They finished about the middle of the pack, but they had a lot of fun, and we had a lot of fun watching them go down the hill.

It's a great opportunity for the hospital to still pull off an amazing event when it was spring-like weather and we had barely any snow available. Thanks to all the coordinators and volunteers who made that event happen. As I said, over \$60,000 is a great amount of money that will definitely be going to not only our addition that's ongoing at the hospital, but for other activities that the foundation supports. Congratulations to everyone who participated.

Mr. Speaker, I'm here today to have the lead-off for the PC Party on Bill 84, the Medical Assistance in Dying Statute Law Amendment Act, 2016. It's a great bill to start discussing in the Legislature. The way I view the bill is basically that it's a housekeeping bill to clean up the implications from the federal legislation that occurred last year with regard to medical assistance in dying.

Back in February 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the Criminal Code prohibiting assistance in dying. In the court's view, assistance in dying should be granted to a competent adult person who clearly consents

to the termination of their life, and has a grievous and irremediable medical condition, including an illness, disease or disability, that causes enduring suffering that is intolerable to the individual in the circumstances of his or her condition.

The Supreme Court of Canada stated that "it is for Parliament and the provincial Legislatures to respond, should they so choose, by enacting legislation consistent with the constitutional parameters set out," with the above reasons. As such, assisted dying became legal in Canada last June, on the 6th. Today, Ontario has introduced Bill 84, which we are starting to debate today, which, as I said before, I see as a housekeeping bill to add protections to various groups, organizations and individuals in the province.

So what does Bill 84 do? Bill 84 provides clarity and legal protections for health care professionals and organizations that provide access to medical-assistance-in-dying services in Ontario in accordance with the federal legislation, Bill C-14. A doctor or nurse practitioner who provides medical-assistance-in-dying services shall notify the coroner with the necessary information to determine whether or not an investigation into the death is necessary. Basically, the Coroners Act is going to be amended to require that the coroner is notified, but it also allows the coroner to determine whether or not to investigate these deaths.

Also changing in this legislation: Death certificates for medical assistance in dying do not need to be signed by the coroner, unless the coroner is investigating the death.

A civil claim against doctors or nurse practitioners or others who provide medical-assistance-in-dying services is being prohibited except in cases of alleged negligence. This is, again, going to be protecting health care providers who will be participating in medical assistance in dying from any lawsuits, which, from the federal legislation, is part of that piece of legislation.

The other part that they're making amendments to: Benefits or other sums provided under contract or statute—basically payouts from insurance or other types of benefits—shall not be denied if the deceased person receives medical assistance in dying. So there we are. This legislation is protecting those families whose loved one has decided to choose medical assistance in dying. It protects those families so that they're able to access the life insurance policy or any other benefit that they're deemed worthy of. Also, the legislation points out that even with workers' compensation, if the medical assistance in dying is due to a condition caused by the workplace where they worked, again, the family can't be denied access to the benefits entitled to them, if they do so choose medical assistance in dying. It also allows for protection of information of the patient and the health care provider in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

What this bill is actually doing is setting out some protections and cleaning up the legislation brought forth by the federal government.

Medical assistance in dying it is a controversial issue, no matter who is talking about it, on one side or the

other. It is now legal in Canada. To many, it will be a valuable tool, a valuable option for them come the end of their life. However, there are other options out there that also need to be looked at.

As pharmacists, very often we deal with people who are in palliative care—who are receiving palliative care either at a hospice in the community or in a hospital—and ensure that they have access to the necessary supports they need in order to facilitate the end-of-life journey in dealing with the pain and suffering that they're undergoing. As noted, it was very important at the time that we were able to give them the pain medications and supports that they needed when visiting a home. Our pharmacy provided supports to the community care access centre nurses, part of their palliative care team. We developed the palliative care medical box. It was a box of various narcotics, antiemetics, and sedatives that would be needed by somebody who is dying at home. This facilitated easy access to the medications, if the proper forms were filled out by the doctor. I think that was a step in the right direction. We were able to get that started in Elgin county, and we've seen many changes since then.

But as mentioned by our House leader, we do have to be cognizant that there will be some health care professionals out there who object to providing medical assistance in dying. We feel it's a right that needs to be protected, and we are looking at making an amendment to this legislation that protects that right, provided there's a quick and accessible process for people to obtain medical assistance in dying. We can find that balance that was mentioned previously by the opposite member, ensuring there's access and quick provision of the services of medical assistance in dying and also protecting the conscience rights of those medical professionals who choose not to participate in medical assistance in dying.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, if we look at, from committee, Bill 41, Maureen Taylor spoke at committee and was the co-chair of the Provincial-Territorial Expert Advisory Group on Physician-Assisted Dying set up by the Ontario government. Her husband, Dr. Don Low, passed away from a brain tumour. He gave an exquisite, emotional plea on YouTube about the need for assistance in dying being legalized in Canada.

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She did say at committee, and I'll quote her, "I want to stress, too, that I totally support the rights of individual health care practitioners not to participate in assisted death if that goes against their conscience."

I think there's a balance out there that we can look at. Even the strong advocates of medical assistance in dying provided expert advice to the government that they too share in the common thought that people's conscience rights are something we need to ensure we can protect out there.

The Coalition for HealthCARE and Conscience has stated that the right to freedom of conscience in religion is enshrined in section 2 of the Charter of Rights and

Freedoms. The protection of rights against discrimination is enshrined.

Many other provinces, such as Alberta, have adopted alternatives to effective referral, and no foreign jurisdiction that allows assisted suicide or euthanasia requires effective referral.

The member opposite is saying there's a balance we have to trend toward. I think there's a balance already out there, an example that we could emulate here in Ontario and ensure that we have quick access to medical assistance in dying while protecting those who have conscientious objections to MAID.

A couple of the jurisdictions that were mentioned—Washington state has a provision in their medical assistance in dying that basically no one will be subject to "censure, discipline, suspension, loss of license, loss of privileges, loss of membership, or other penalty for participating or refusing to participate in good faith compliance" with medical assistance in dying.

In California, the health care provider, professional organization or association "shall not subject an individual to censure, discipline, suspension, loss of license, loss of privileges, loss of membership, or other penalty for participating in good faith compliance with this part or for refusing to participate in accordance with subdivision (e)," which is participation in activities authorized pursuant to voluntary medical assistance in dying.

Oregon, another state, and Vermont have ensured that the balance is there for those who need to access medical assistance in dying and those whose objections of conscience prevent them from participating.

I've reached out to a few of the stakeholders and I'm still talking to many as we go forward. I'm glad the government took the opportunity to meet with as many organizations as possible. It's good to see that there was some outreach on their part here. I'm waiting to hear back from a few patients' groups.

However, speaking with the Canadian Medical Association, their policy is to support those who will choose to provide/participate in medical assistance in dying and also those who will not. Their position articulates a duty that is widely morally acceptable and allows physicians to act as moral agents without in any way impeding or delaying patient access to assisted dying. They support the freedom-of-conscience choice.

They have advised the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario to revise their effective-referral approach. Basically, they want to say that if Canada is to emerge with a consistent, pan-Canadian framework, they should be working with what's going on with the other colleges in this country. By revising their effective referral approach, the CPSO is encouraged to support the creation of systems and resources that would facilitate access for those seeking medical-assistance-in-dying services.

The College of Nurses of Ontario: Medical assistance in dying only allows nurse practitioners and physicians to administer medications to cause the death of a client. RNs and RPNs can participate in providing nursing care

in aiding the nurse practitioner or physician to provide a person with medical assistance in dying. The college recognizes a nurse's freedom of conscience. This legislation does not compel an individual to provide/assist in medical assistance in dying, but the nurse's conscience objection must not be directly conveyed to the client, and their personal judgments regarding beliefs/lifestyle/identity are not to be expressed to the client. The client must be transferred to another nurse or health care provider who is willing to fulfill the client's medical-assistance-in-dying request. Until a replacement nurse is found, said nurse must remain with the client and continue providing nursing care.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, which has been the topic of a bit of my sentences here: When the physicians limit the health service they provide for reasons of conscience or religion, the CPSO requires that they provide patients with an effective referral. An effective referral ensures a patient is connected in a timely manner to another physician who is non-objecting, accessible and available to the patient. An effective referral does not guarantee a patient will receive treatment. It ensures access to care and demonstrates respect for patient autonomy.

I mentioned the coalition for health care and conscience rights. They represent over 110 health care facilities, which includes over 18,000 beds, 60,000 staff members and 5,000 doctors in Canada. Their members come from diverse perspectives, but agree that taking a patient's life or referring this procedure violates one of the following: the Hippocratic oath, religious convictions, missions and values, professional ethics, creed or their deeply held conviction that health care should heal people and not hasten death.

Now, a benefit is that I've heard the government is working with this group to try to facilitate a solution for this controversy that has flowed from a certain segment of the medical professions in this province. I'm hoping they work towards ensuring that there's a process that can take over for these doctors who want to object for conscientious rights, one which does allow for quick access to medical assistance in dying.

The Ontario Medical Association: supporting a patient self-referral option for medical assistance in dying in addition to current clinician referral service. OMA supports the efforts to ensure patient access, but recognizes that some physicians believe the act of making a direct referral conflicts with their fundamental beliefs. The OMA does not support CPSO's effective-referral policy.

RPNAO, Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario: Their principal concern remains how medical assistance in dying will impact the quality and funding of Ontario's palliative care services. The RPNAO wants to ensure that we still have a good, strong support in growing access to palliative care throughout this province.

As I mentioned earlier, Alberta has a process in place which basically—I have it here. I'm going to go from my notes here. Alberta has adopted an alternative to effective

referral, and we have to note that no other jurisdiction that allows assisted suicide or euthanasia requires an effective referral.

Alberta offers care-coordinated services. Patients will have access to a single point of contact for all end-of-life options. These services connect patients to health care providers who can best meet their unique needs.

Alberta Health Services advises patients to speak with their normal health care providers about receiving medical assistance in dying. However, if the physician does not provide this service, they can contact the Medical Assistance in Dying Care Coordination Service through telephone or by email. This process protects a physician's conscience rights as well as ensuring a patient will be able to access the services they're requesting.

I've had many conversations over the last year with a number of doctors. One is Dr. Ramona Coelho. She's a doctor in my region of Ontario, who works in London and loves her job thoroughly. She's been a loving doctor, helping people, and loves being with them to find solutions to their problems. She has a strong marginalized patient practice. Many of her patients are on permanent disability. However, Mrs. Coelho is right straightforward with all her patients at the start that she doesn't believe in providing medical assistance in dying.

She's been practising for 10 years and, through her 10 years, her ethical limits have never been a problem with her patients due to her upfront discussions with them when they become her patients. She has never experienced an argument with a patient, nor has a patient complained about her with regard to her conscience beliefs.

Dr. Coelho convenes meetings at the London Catholic doctors' guild, and has spoken up in defence of conscience rights for doctors on a number of occasions.

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As a young doctor, Ramona was asked to teach medical students about family medicine, and was even encouraged to apply for a faculty position before she and her urologist husband made the move to London. Somehow, that accommodating, respectful and practical spirit began to evaporate after Dr. Ramona and her husband moved to Ontario.

All she wants is a solution, preferably something that protects her conscience rights and respects her right to freedom of choice, and not to be punished by the college of physicians and surgeons. She fears that the next generation of Catholic medical students will be steered out of family medicine, which to her is terrible. Every faith and creed should have the right to practise medicine, provided access is available to those who need the services they need.

We believe, as I mentioned earlier, that there's room for improvement. This bill does a great job of cleaning up certain aspects created by the federal legislation in protecting health care professionals, protecting families. We feel that we have an opportunity to ensure that a process is put in place to ensure access to medical

assistance in dying in a timely fashion at the same time as providing protection of conscience rights.

The government plays a big role in ensuring that this process is in place. Unfortunately, there hasn't been a lot coming out of this government in terms of communications to health care professionals and to the opposition parties at this Legislature. That's unfortunate. We need to see medical-assistance-in-dying services in Ontario. However, we believe we need to find the common ground we mentioned much, much earlier.

Legislation processes should be put in place to allow doctors to continue to serve their patients while having their conscientious objections legally provided, provided, as I said earlier, that there's a process put in place for easy access to medical assistance in dying.

Mr. Speaker, diagnosis of a terminal disease is a reality that many have experienced in one form or another. Through our significant others, extended families and friends, each one of us, I think, has been affected by this tragedy at one point in our lives. It's very devastating when someone is diagnosed with a condition that our medical advances cannot cure.

The federal government has added a new avenue for patients to access medical assistance in dying. However, we must remember that that isn't the only option out there. We can't lose sight that there are other options that we can take a look at.

Palliative care is a great option which is aimed at relieving suffering and improving the quality of life for persons living with or dying from an advanced illness. Palliative care is to help the journey at the end of someone's life. It's a journey for the patient and the family to take together. The goal of palliative care is to provide comfort and dignity for the person living with the illness and for their families. Palliative care helps with the need for physical care, as well as psychological, social, cultural, emotional and spiritual care.

Palliative care will not prolong someone's life. It is commonly used as an option for families who have exhausted all other options and, again, are ending the journey of life. Palliative care can be given at home, it can be given at a hospital, and it can be given in a hospice.

Unfortunately, in my riding of Elgin–Middlesex–London, Elgin county does not have a hospice. I'm currently a part of a committee with the LHIN, health care providers and community members to prepare our county for a hospice. We've partnered with St. Joseph's Hospice of London, who is paying for our RFP to look at the services actually needed in Elgin county, so that when the government comes around with funding for the next batch of hospices, Elgin county is prepared to break ground and build that hospice.

We're hoping to have funding in place, and a hospice built sometime next year is our goal. We're hoping the government does well with its commitment to expanding hospices. Unfortunately, many in St. Thomas and Elgin county have access to seven beds out of London, so you can see the lack of availability of hospice beds.

I toured the Kensington Hospice, which isn't far from here, a few months ago. What a beautiful place—a home environment, a caring environment, that is welcoming to patients and families and helps them through their journey at the ends of their lives.

I do want to give special mention to two groups in Elgin county, HOPE and Serenity House. Both have been very supportive of palliative care and hospice care in our region for a long time. HOPE has recently expanded their services for grief counselling for youth.

As I mentioned earlier, palliative care and hospice care incorporate support for the families not only during times of sickness and end of life, but when a loved one has passed on and has died, the support is still there to help those people deal with their grief. I think it's great that HOPE has taken the time to create a program to help the youth of our area deal with the loss of a loved one.

Canada is not the only area or the first jurisdiction to offer medical assistance in dying. I've already mentioned a handful of others, but it should be noted that other countries in Europe have been dealing with medical assistance in dying for years upon years. I think it's an opportunity. If the government wants to reach a balance, we need to look at other jurisdictions and what is occurring, and maybe get to that balance a lot quicker than what is going on right now—to alleviate the concerns of the health care professionals, but also ensure that the access is there for them.

Speaking of other jurisdictions in the health care system, it's interesting to take a look and compare our health care system with regard to other jurisdictions in the world. The Commonwealth Fund report, which is an accepted report globally, ranks health care systems country by country. Unfortunately, Canada ranks 10th overall among 11 industrial countries on measures of health system quality, efficiency, access to care, equity and healthy lives. We're 11th in timeliness of care.

While we are debating the bill on medical assistance in dying, we should not forget that other issues affect patient care, such as the length of time it does take to see that specialist, to get that diagnosis, or the length of time it takes for a patient to get the palliative care services they receive. I know I've mentioned Elgin county, without a hospice, is left to a newly formed physician–nurse group for community palliative care, but that's just new.

I visited northern Ontario a week ago, Sault Ste. Marie and Timmins. The health care accessibility for them is extreme. The doctors in Chapleau were mentioning how hard it is for people to access palliative care and mental health care in a timely manner, and the burden it's putting on the lone doctors in the area.

We have to take a look that when we measure our health care system, we need to start comparing ourselves to other countries to see where we really do sit and where there are other jurisdictions that are performing much better than we are. We can do much better than we are doing right now. And the more we quarrel with our doctors, as this government has been doing for three

years now, and demoralizing our nurses, the harder and longer it is for the patients to access the health care services they need. So when we're talking about access to medical assistance in dying, we also need to be talking about access to palliative care, access to a family physician, access to that specialist and access to that test in order that they receive care in a timely manner.

Many palliative care physicians in this province are lacking in the support needed from this government. They've made some mentions and some announcements, but this government, over 15 years, has really accomplished very little in terms of quality palliative care.

Mr. Speaker, what are the top three challenges Ontario faces today in the health care system? I've mentioned wait times and access to care. The Auditor General's report noted a few months ago that operating rooms are closed. In southwestern Ontario, if you want knee or hip replacement surgery, the financial year starts in April, and by October they're out of money. It's a rationed, underfunded system, which is compounding the wait-list.

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The second-highest challenge Ontarians face is the financial and emotional burden of supporting a loved one at home. The government has moved to create a larger bureaucracy. A year ago, the government came out with an Auditor General's report which showed that 39% of the money going into the CCACs stays in the management and bureaucracy administration. It doesn't reach front-line care.

This government has utilized Bill 41 to merge the LHINs and the CCACs, and, two weeks ago, created 84 new vice-president positions throughout the province. They've created 78 sub-LHINs. The level of management is growing at the expense of patient care. It's growing at the expense of access to palliative care, access to medical assistance in dying, access to that heart surgery, access to the knee surgery you need.

Mr. Speaker, the third point of what Ontarians need and are experiencing the challenge in is the lack of available services in northern and rural/remote areas. As I mentioned earlier, with the northern Ontario tour in Sault Ste. Marie, at the physician clinic we visited, due to government cutbacks, the amount of mental health supports is gone. They're unable to provide the supports. I was speaking to a doctor at London Health Sciences Centre who has provided much of the mental health supports outside in the rural parts of the riding. The cuts this government has imposed on the system—there's a lack of support for youth mental health in the area.

In Chapleau, as I mentioned a few minutes ago, the Chapleau doctors—there are three of them working full-time and there's a fourth doctor, who is in his 80s, who is pulling his own weight. Two of the doctors are married. In order to have the full coverage, many times these doctors do not get time off, in order to provide after-hour emergency, weekend coverage. You'll find these doctors are burning out because they're working seven days a week the majority of the year, 24 hours on call. And these doctors have been demoralized over the last three

years with how this government has vilified doctors to the public. It's unfortunate.

This government, over 13 years, has attempted many experiments on the health care system. Each one of those experiments has been costly to the patients of Ontario, because much-needed money for front-line patient care has been spent on management and administration growth. They created the LHINs. They've changed the structure of their own ministry five times. They've changed the role of the CCACs. They've changed the structure of the CCACs. They were responsible for one of the biggest scandals of all time, eHealth, which is currently at \$8 billion spent on eHealth with no timeline to completion and many, many problems. They created hospital hubs. They increased Ministry of Health management structure by 500%. They increased departments within the ministry by 500%.

When the Auditor General announced that, as I mentioned earlier, 39 cents of every home care dollar is going towards administration, they created Bill 41. Bill 41 does nothing for patient care, even though it's called the Patients First Act. Bill 41 creates a larger management structure. It merges CCACs with the LHINs and creates 78 sub-LHINs, as I've mentioned.

We've got to be wary with every announcement this government makes with regard to the titles they use in legislation. The Patients First Act and many pieces of legislation and acts are really about how they can create a higher, more burdensome bureaucracy. As we mentioned earlier today—in the question I mentioned about three-year-old Madison, who needs surgery so that she can walk—the ministry has approved the surgery, but they don't fund it. The minister has a report on his desk and recommendations from their health experts on what to do with this surgery. I don't know why the government isn't acting on it. But, unfortunately, this poor three-year-old has to go to St. Louis for surgery. Unfortunately, because of the bureaucracy's red tape that has been created, it's virtually impossible to get through the entire paper—I wish somebody on the Ministry of Health side would help this poor family out to ensure that we can get some funding for them. They have to raise \$140,000 to get the surgery that's needed. They've made it difficult, almost impossible, for this family to gain access.

The Premier's answer spoke volumes to this government: "I don't understand why it's listed but not funded." It's because they've gotten so large in the management structure of the Ministry of Health that the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing.

What we need to do is to ensure that health care policies going forward benefit patient care, that we're focusing our work on direct patient care, that we're working with our health care professionals—our doctors, nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists, respiratory therapists, physician assistants, RPNs—ensuring that they have the tools and support they need to provide the patient care that's needed in this province.

This bill on medical assistance in dying brings forth cleaning-up legislation, but we have to ensure that we are

protecting the public and that we're protecting health care providers. We have an opportunity to protect the conscience rights of health care professionals with some amendments, for which I think we can find a suitable solution between the three parties. But we also have to ensure that we don't forget the other aspects, the other options out there for people who are on their end-of-life journey: to ensure that there is sufficient hospice care available to people; to ensure that hospitals have the correct numbers of staff and funding to deal with palliative care; to ensure our community care and community support system—that the management is minimized and more money is flowing to support the health care professionals that are calling on a loved one's home to take care of them in their end-of-life journey; and just to ensure that palliative care and medical assistance in dying get equal share and equal support as options from this government.

I think we can get there, Mr. Speaker. I think we can find a path. The experiments have to stop on the other side of this House. The government needs to start working with those involved with direct care. They need to look at other jurisdictions instead of creating everything in-house, like they tend to do. We can get there, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank all the members here today for joining us this afternoon and listening. I appreciate your willingness to listen. I look forward to debate and amendments at committee. As I said, I think we can get to shared ground, a level playing field here. We'll be supporting the legislation, and we hope that at committee we can ensure that patients will get access to timely care and medical assistance in dying, while also protecting the rights of our medical professionals.

I just want to reiterate that we need to ensure that we have the supports in place in our health care system so that people have access to all the services that they need to access during their lifespan, from birth to death, and that we have a quality funded health care system that ensures the respect of our health care providers, but also ensures the respect and wishes of our patients.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was very interesting to listen to the member. It's pretty hard to talk about medical assistance in dying without making the jump to good-quality palliative care. He gave the example from his own riding where they do not have a hospice. This is something that many communities in Ontario do not have.

We've had promises of more hospice beds coming to Ontario. Actually, we still have a promise on the books. From the last promise, there are 10 hospices that we still haven't seen, and now the government is making new promises of hospice beds coming.

At the end of the day, good palliative care is part, as he said, of the continuum of care. If you want to have a robust health care system, this has to be a part of it. Palliative care has to be there. It has to be accessible to

where people live. It's not reasonable to ask somebody from my riding to travel 400 kilometres to go to a palliative care bed. That means the family is not around. That means you will live your last days in isolation.

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I want to put a pitch out, though, for a very good home that we have. It used to be called Maison Vale Hospice; it's now called Maison McCulloch Hospice. It has just been renamed. They do fantastic work. They're located in Sudbury, and a lot of people from Nickel Belt use them.

It makes a world of difference when you have access to good palliative care. I agree with my colleague on that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. John Fraser: I want to thank the member for his remarks in support of the bill. Before we get into some of the things that he was talking about, I do want to congratulate him and thank him for—I know he's a pharmacist by profession. Working on things like the palliative care box for your community is a really critical thing—and also supporting a hospice in your community. I want to thank him for his involvement in that. I'm sure his community is very grateful.

There are a few things you said that I take issue with, that I don't agree with, but I don't want to talk about those things right now. I just want to go back to what I said earlier. This is a really difficult issue. It's an issue that is potentially very divisive. If we take hardened positions on either side, we are not going to do ourselves good service. I know the minister has been working hard with those physicians and practitioners of conscience who are concerned about a care coordination service very similar to the model they have in Alberta. I want to assure the member that that work is going on and that we are very aware of those things, and communicating. Again, they're not simple things.

I just want to reiterate that we need some proximity to this issue. There are a lot of different opinions on this issue, and some of the opinions you get are from people who you would not expect to get them from. It's critical that, as a society, we come through this thing together and not be polarized, on opposite sides, not fully respecting the other's opinion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to add my voice to debate today as we come back to kick off the next session.

A lot of work has been done on this file, and I really appreciate the heart and the effort that our health critic has put in to make sure that he is well informed—and not just well informed from his own personal riding, but from across the province. He is working very, very hard to make sure all stakeholders are respected and heard, and I thank him for doing a great job in that regard.

I do have to say, we heard him talk about raising funds in his riding with regard to a tubing event. I would suggest that our member from Elgin—Middlesex—London

actually should be on that tube with his daughter. I think he can still do it. He was saying that he was too old, but I'm pretty sure—I'll challenge him to get on that tube next time around with his daughter. We want to see that. I know you won't end up in the hospital because you're pretty young yet, and flexible.

Setting that aside, he did bring up some very important aspects in terms of hospices. We all care about a respected journey. I know I've had discussions across the floor, as well, with regard to the importance of respecting communities that are working hard to have hospices geographically distributed—that is fair to communities throughout the ridings.

With regard to Bill 84 specifically, we can't stress enough, from the PC Party of Ontario: Objectors need to be heard in a respectful way, and we need to have confidence that this government is going to have a process in which people are respected—providers, specifically, who may not want to provide medical assistance in dying.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's a pleasure to follow the comments by my friend from Elgin—Middlesex—London. He knows a lot about this file, and I know many of us in this Legislature do.

I suppose down in my area we're more familiar with it because we go back to 1990, when Jack Kevorkian was in Detroit. Jack Kevorkian, Speaker, for your information, eventually took credit for helping out 130 patients who were terminally ill and wanted to end their lives on their own terms.

I mentioned before a man from Windsor, Austin Bastable. He was 53 and had MS. He was the first Canadian who was assisted by Dr. Kevorkian. Austin Bastable thought he was given a life sentence for a crime he didn't commit, and he just wanted to get out of it.

Michigan kept taking Dr. Kevorkian to court, I think four times. He beat them three times; the fourth one was declared a mistrial. They kept changing the law. Eventually, they convicted him of second-degree murder. He served eight years of a 10-to-25-year sentence. He was paroled, and part of the conditions of that parole was that he could no longer participate in or be present at any type of suicide involving euthanasia. He wasn't allowed to even talk about it or promote it or even tell any other stories about his experience. He did get into politics,

though. He ran for Congress. Even though he was well known, he didn't get that many votes. I think he got less than 3%. He got about 9,000 votes when he ran for Congress.

His claim to fame, I guess you could say, is that he ignited an international debate on this issue. After all those years, from 1990 to now, it has brought that debate to this House. I thank the member from Ottawa South and the member from Elgin—Middlesex—London for bringing it to our attention this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Elgin—Middlesex—London for final comment.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I would like to thank the members from Nickel Belt, Ottawa South, Huron—Bruce and Windsor—Tecumseh for their comments with regard to the comments that I made previously on medical assistance in dying.

I think we've laid out a good start for this debate, and I'm looking forward to hearing what comes forth from all three parties going forward as we deal with this issue. As I said, the bill is cleaning up a lot of the tidbits that needed to be cleaned up from the federal legislation—ensuring that families are protected and health care professionals are protected from litigation; that families have access to the rights and benefits that they truly need; and that information is protected from those who participate in medical assistance in dying.

As I said earlier, we can hopefully reach common ground. I'm hoping the government is open to listening to amendments and debate at committee and will judge each amendment as it comes forward—as opposed to what has been the history of dealing with this government over the last two years: They don't listen to what's going on in committee, nor do they ever support any amendments brought forward by the opposition. I'm hoping that, at the end of the day, we can work for the betterment of the patients of Ontario, ensuring timely access to medical assistance in dying while at the same time ensuring the conscious rights of our health care professionals are respected.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It's now 6 o'clock. This House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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